The WEIRD STORY MAGAZINE

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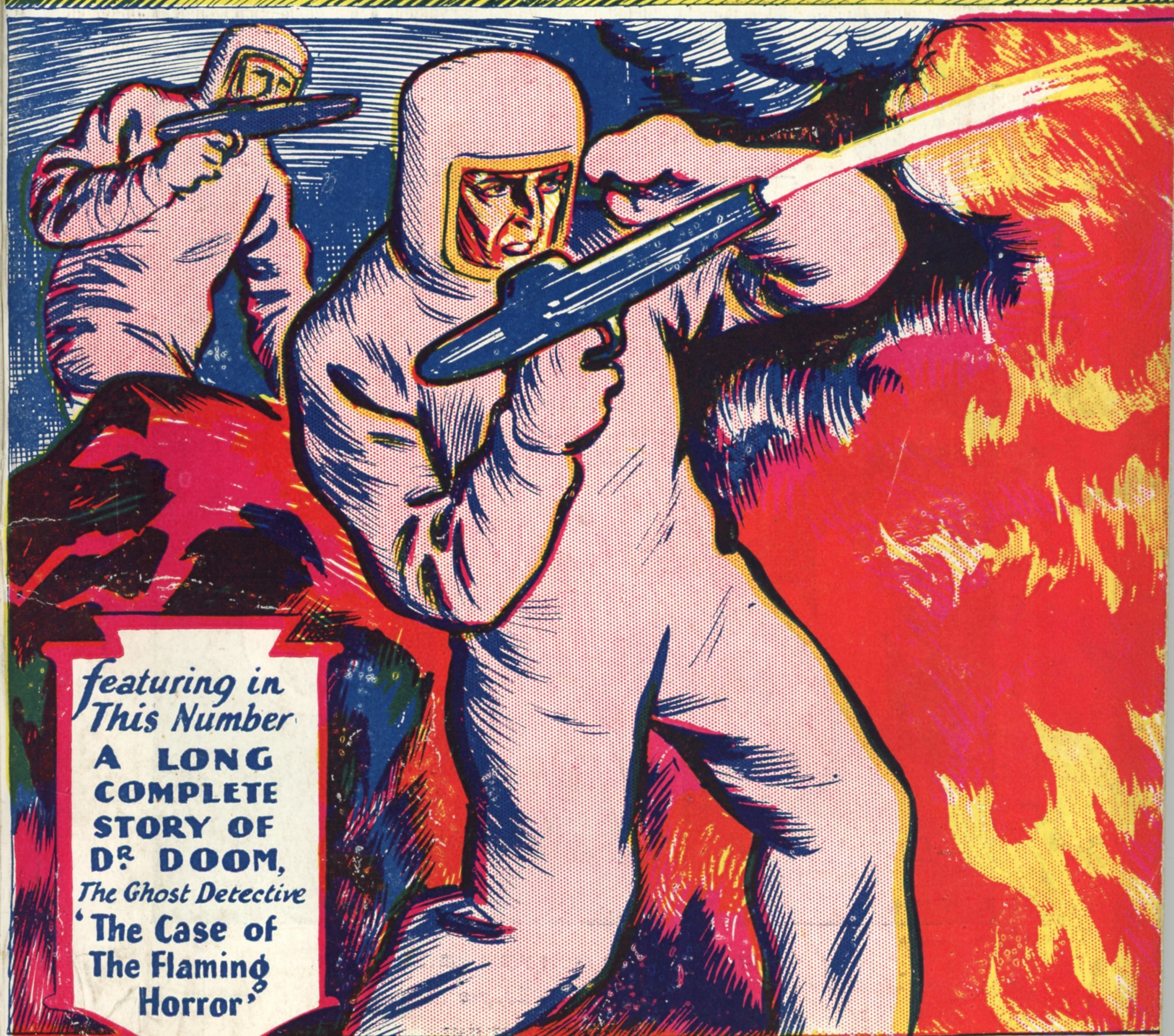

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The characters depicted in these stories are entirely fictitious and have no reference to any living person

WOMEN'S NOVELS
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DOCTOR DOOM, GHOST DETECTIVE

by WILLIAM J. ELLIOTT

CHARLIE SLANE, his left hand grasping that of the thin man on his left, his right imprisoned in the rather damp one of the fat woman who was his other neighbour, glanced furtively round the circle. The faces, faint and fitfully illuminated only by the glow from the log fire that burned in the grate, seemed to display a choice of only two characteristics—they were either stupid or evil.

A queer bunch, Charlie thought, that he had dropped into on this

week-end visit to his Aunt Emily's place. He had known she was interested in spiritualism, but hadn't met any of her cronies before. Including himself there were six people present, leaving out the medium—a fat Jew and Jewess, a tall, thin man who looked like an out-of-work actor, a slim girl, who might have been pretty if she hadn't been so pasty and unhealthy-looking, his Aunt, and himself. And then there was the medium, who sat fastened to his chair by straps with only his hands free, and those were grasped by the thin man on one side, and his Aunt Emily on the other. In the full light he had a rather unpleasant looking face—hollow-cheeked and gaunt; in this light he looked like a Devil!

Charlie Slane, who scoffed at this sort of thing, felt a sudden sense of uneasiness. There was an atmosphere of *evil* in the room, somehow.

The medium had promised a materialisation. Somebody had asked what form it might take, and the medium had shrugged his high, bony shoulders, and answered:

" Who knows— Maybe a beautiful maiden—maybe a godlike young man! Or perhaps an evil old crone —a witch! Or possibly even a devil! It all depends on the quality of your thoughts, my friends. And I warn you—there is a risk! There must always be a risk when we supply, even for the briefest period, a discarnate entity with bodily form! Some of them are evil—malignant—dangerous!"

"We'll take the risk!" Aunt Emily had snapped, in her brisk way. " And I hope you'll agree to the use of the straps, so we may be sure there is no hocus-pocus . . . !"

After all, she paid the man a fee—there was no need to be polite to him! But the medium had shot a quick, rather malignant glance (or so Charlie had thought) at her, as he answered, smoothly:

" Use all the straps you like, Madam—it will make no difference!"

And now they had been sitting for nearly an hour in that big studio-attic of Pendleton Manor, lit only by the log-fire they had been forced to have on account of the cold. They would have frozen stiff, otherwise.

Charlie, though he scoffed at what he called " spiritualistic nonsense " had agreed to sit with them because he was a journalist by profession, and it might mean " copy." But, scoffer as he was, he was very sensitive to atmosphere, and now it seemed to him that he could literally *smell* evil in the air. And he had a feeling, too, that something was going to happen.

There came a sound from his right —the thin man had caught his breath. And Charlie felt the hand in his stiffen, and go tense—it was an unpleasant-feeling hand, rather reminiscent of a spider. Charlie glanced at him—he was staring up towards the ceiling. Charlie became aware, too, that the medium was breathing very quickly—almost panting.

Charlie followed the thin man's gaze, and was startled to see, suspended in the air above the centre of the round table at which they were sitting, a faint luminosity. It densened—grew less luminous, and took the form of a white mist. It was shaped like a reversed pear, the thin end pointing to the ceiling. As though suspended from an invisible thread. It was growing larger; more dense; whiter . . . !

Opposite him the girl let the breath out through her teeth with a hissing sound, and exclaimed in a low, half-

frightened voice:

" Ah, Ectoplasm . . . !"

Charlie had a sensation as though a tight violin-string had suddenly snapped, and the voice of the medium low, toneless and mechanical, said:

" Please do not speak—whatever happens. You break the contact if you do!"

The nebulous, white stuff in the air faded away far more quickly than it had come—it was as though a wind had dispersed it. The fat Jewess exclaimed, disappointedly:

" There you are, you see!"

" Silence, please!" snapped Aunt Emily. " We want results—not comments!"

Silence reigned once more. It might have been a few minutes or half-an-hour—Charlie was commencing to lose his sense of time—when again he sensed evil in the air. This time it was more definite. It was as though something was *moving*—invisibly and soundlessly—in the room. Hardly that, though, it was as though the air was *quivering*. Charlie felt a sense of tremendous repulsion—it became almost physical, so that he wanted to be physically sick. In spite of himself he felt a shudder go through him, and then he commenced to sweat.

" Good Lord," he thought to himself, " I mustn't let myself get scared by this sort of thing—it's childish . . . !"

Then he realised that he was not actually scared—and that he was sweating, not from fear, but because the room, hitherto rather chilly, had suddenly and unexplainably become very hot. There had been a nasty draught playing round the back of his neck all the time, and it was still there—but now it was *hot*, almost like a blast from a furnace!

Charlie glanced at the others, and in the dim, reddish glow of the logs he could plainly see that beads of perspiration stood out on all their white, tense faces. It was literally running down the Jew's fat face. So they were all feeling it!

Charlie became aware of a sound. It was the medium breathing. It got harder and harder; quicker and quicker; louder and louder; until he was panting like a dog that has been running.

The feeling of heat and the sense of evil increased together. It was a wicked sort of heat—fierce and burning, like the heat from an open furnace, and yet at the same time, close and fetid, like the hot breath of some malignant animal. It seemed, somehow, to stink . . . !

Charlie thought: " I shan't be able to stand this much longer—I shall faint, or something!"

The medium was making low moaning noises, like a dog in pain. The Jewess was gripping Charlie's hand convulsively, and he found that he was doing the same thing to the thin man. . . .

Surely the room was growing lighter . . . ?

Charlie stretched his neck to look at the fire, and saw at once that something was happening there. The fire had been burning a little low, but now it seemed to be blazing more fiercely than it had ever done. And yet not exactly blazing—it was more as though it was *boiling*, like water. Charlie had never seen anything like it before. Queer globules of fire seemed to be whirling about in it—like the bubbles in boiling water. And, as steam rises from boiling water, so a thick black smoke, greasy and evil-looking, was commencing to form above the burning mass. But it

did not go up the chimney—it commenced to come slowly out into the room, partially obscuring the fire. . .

Then Charlie's attention was distracted by the thin man. He gave a convulsive shudder, and started to cough in a queer, bubbling sort of way. Charlie looked at him, and saw with horror that blood was running out of his mouth and down his chin. "Consumptive!" thought Charlie. "And this has brought on a hemorrhage!"

He was about to call for light and aid for the sick man, but before he could do so there came a sudden, terrified shriek from the girl:

"*Christ*! Look at the fire—there's something in it—something *alive*!"

Charlie looked at the fire, and there, behind the veil of smoke, got a glimpse of something that moved. Something that glowed red and had some sort of grotesque resemblance to a miniature human being—that is to say it seemed to have arms and legs, and he thought he caught a glimpse of a sort of face—pointed ears, slit eyes that glowed a different colour from the rest of it. It was no bigger than a small monkey, but there was something terrifying about it.

Then, before he could get a real impression, that thick, greasy smoke suddenly rolled out in a great cloud, and filled the room so densely that he could only just vaguely see his immediate neighbours, and the fire and the Thing in it became only a nebulous sort of glow. The smoke was thick and hot as he drew it into his lungs—it was like swallowing a hot drink. Bit it did not choke one.

Only the thin man was still choking and bubbling beside him. Then there came a loud hissing and crackling sound, and what seemed to be a ball of flame described an arc through the smoke straight, as it seemed, at him. No, not at him, at his neighbour. . . .

Charlie got a glimpse of Something that clung, with what seemed to be limbs, to the shoulders of the thin man. Something that glowed and flickered like fire, and that illuminated the face and chest of the thin man in ghastly fashion, showing the blood that was running out of his mouth and down his chin. *And the fiery thing was sucking and licking at that blood . . .* !

That impression Charlie got in a split second—the next he had leapt from his chair and reeled back to the terrific blast of heat that he could feel singeing his hair and eyebrows, and that for an instant rendered him blind. . .

Then the thin man started to scream. His screaming rose high and shrill, on the undullating note caused only by the most terrible agony. And in the next second he had burst into flames—his clothes, his hair, his very flesh itself, blazing as though he had been soaked in petrol. Still screaming he leapt and tore round the room, and Charlie could actually see the flesh burning from his bones as he went. And after him, leaping and dancing as though with fiendish joy, went that red, burning Thing!

Pandemonium had broken out now, and the room was filled with screams and yells of pain and terror, the crashing and smashing of furniture, and the crackling of flames—for everywhere that squat, unearthly Figure that pursued the burning man went, flames broke out—carpet, curtains, even furniture were commencing to blaze.

The thin man, still blazing like a resinous torch, fell flat on his face,

and Charlie saw the Thing—which now seemed to be a little bigger than at first—leap on to his back like a beast of prey.

Hardly knowing what he did, Charlie snatched up a heavy chair, and shutting his eyes against the heat, rushed in and smote with all his force at the Horror. There came a roaring sound, like the roar of angry flames, and Charlie opened his eyes to see that the chair he held was broken and burning like tinder, and to catch a glimpse of a Flaming Thing that rushed through the doorway and disappeared down the stairs.

Now Charlie, almost overcome, had only one thought in mind—his Aunt Emily! He groped through the smoke, which was commencing to clear a little, towards where he had seen her last. Yes, there she was, lying still and inert on the floor!

There were burning patches in the carpet about her, and close to her the medium was still sitting in his chair, which was blazing, screaming like a stuck pig, and struggling vainly with the straps that held him. In spite of the horror, Charlie got a ridiculous thought of Guy Fawkes, and almost laughed.

Luckily he had a knife in his pocket, and he took a pride in keeping it razor-keen. He whipped it out and cut the straps that confined the medium's arms—no time for more! He left him to fend for himself, snatched up the limp form of his Aunt, tossed it over his shoulder, and, almost all-in, staggered with her through the door.

Only to find that the stairs were blazing!

But he had to get through it, somehow! He literally flung himself at the flames, and went half-stumbling, half-falling, down the stairs. But miraculously he kept his feet. The landing below, and the stairs below that, were burning, and he knew he couldn't get further! He swayed to the left, staggered into a room that was as yet free from the flames and which had french-windows leading out on to a balcony. He hurled himself at the windows without trying to open them, crashed through, and came up against the railing of the balcony.

And at that instant consciousness left him. His Aunt slid off his shoulders on to the floor of the balcony, and he collapsed over the railing, his head and arms hanging supinely downwards, the rest of his body a limp heap on the inside of the railing. . . .

Down below the flames roared and crackled, and wherever they were hottest and fiercest a keen eye might have detected a strange, grotesque Shape that leapt and whirled amongst them, and grew slowly bigger and bigger as it did so. . . .

When, a little later, the Pendletons Fire Brigade arrived on the scene, two wings of the three that made up the old Manor were almost completely gutted. Of the third, the outer wall still stood, as yet untouched by the fire, and a limp figure was seen hanging over the balcony on the first floor. So the escape was run up, the bodies of Charlie Slane and his Aunt Emily, without consciousness and terribly burned, but with life still in them, were brought safely down.

Meanwhile, round at the back of the house, Fireman Purvic was rather hopelessly directing a stream of water from his hose where the flames burned most fiercely. Then suddenly it seemed to him that the roar of the

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flames grew louder and fiercer, and out of them leapt a Something that he could not distinguish as being human or animal (though he thought of it afterwards as a "great, red-hot monkey). As it did so the water from the hose struck it full, and it seemed to hiss "like a thousand snakes." A great cloud of steam rose from it, too, and for a moment screened it from the vision of the flabbergasted fireman.

Then he saw it again, moving at incredible speed, in a series of leaps and jumps, towards the wooden fence. A moment later the fence burst into flames at one spot, and the Thing had disappeared.

Fireman Purvis (he was a house-painter by trade) was a sensible, practical sort of man. He put out the burning fence with his hose in a few minutes, and then, thinking over what he had seen—or imagined he had seen—he realized that he would have great difficulty in describing it to anyone, and that if he did he would probably be laughed at. So he decided to say nothing about it.

On the night that this happened—it was March 25th—the moon was already on the wane.

Two nights later, Farmer Branksome, of Middlemarch Farm—which was about a mile from the gutted manor, of which he was a tenant—had some trouble with a sick cow. He left his warm kitchen at about 11 p.m. and went across to the byre, carrying with him a bright stable lantern. It being War-time, this was dead against the regulations, but Farmer Branksome didn't worry much about that—he guessed the local Air Raid Warden and the policeman would hardly be around at that hour of the night.

He tended his cow with skill and patience, what time the waning moon rose in the cloudless sky. At about 2.30 a.m. he decided the cow would be alright, and, yawning and very tired, he left the byre to go back to the Farmhouse, still carrying that bright lantern.

The first thing he noticed when he got out of the byre was that the temperature seemed to have undergone an astonishing change while he had been in there. For whereas when he had turned out it had been sharply cold, now it was singularly warm.

" Well, I reckon we can expect darned near anything from this bloomin' climate of ours!" said the Farmer to himself.

But as he opened the gate and went into the yard that led to his backdoor he suddenly realised that it really was phenomenal, this heat. It was as close as mid-summer!

And yet, not only close. It was *hot* —the air itself seemed to be charged with heat!

" Jest like as though there was a fire somewhere handy!" muttered the Farmer—and turned to look about him to see if there was any sign of such a thing. But there was no sign of any such thing—no sparks, no ruddy glow in the sky. Only the waning moon riding serenely in the middle of it.

The Farmer put down his lamp on the bricks, and mopped his sweating brow. As he turned once more to pick up his lamp and go in his eyes swept over his own five-acre field—and suddenly he saw his fire!

Not one, but two or three of them. Little tiny fires, they were, spurting up one after another like a chain along the grass, and rapidly coming nearer to him. A line of little fires, lighting up, one after the other, with out fifteen yards between each of

them!

Farmer Branksome stared, in amazement. Then he thought he could see some sort of a figure moving. It seemed to him that it was leaping, like a frog, and that every-time it touched the ground one of those little fires sprang into being. The figure, too, seemed to have a sort of glow about it—as though it carried some sort of diffused light, or as though it had a lantern, with a red shade, trained upon it. And every moment it was coming nearer.

"By gum!" said the Farmer, aloud. "Someone fooling around, eh? *I'll* larn 'em!"

He left the lantern burning brightly where he had put it down on the bricks—and thereby sealed his fate—while he dashed into his kitchen, snatched down the loaded, double-barrel gun from it's rack over the fireplace, and then ran swiftly out into the yard again.

Some of the little fires had gone out—the wet grass was not very inflammable—others nearer at hand, were -still smouldering—and after that his vision was cut off by the high tarred wooden fence that shut in his yard. But over the top of the fence he could see a distinct glow, ruddy, like that thrown by a biggish bonfire.

"*Now* I'll have ye, my bucko . . !" breathed the Farmer, and he moved swiftly and on tip-toe towards the yard gate, which was a five-barred affair.

Then, suddenly, there came a sort of flashing through the air, as something leapt, and then perched on top of the gate, as a bird might have done. But, flinching before the terrific blast of heat that suddenly struck his face and half-blinded him, the Farmer could still see that it was neither bird nor beast—nor man—that perched thus momentarily on his gate. He had a vision of Something that had a big, round body, little short legs—if they *were* legs—and enormously long, pendulous arms. On the top of it all a tiny little head, quite round, but with small, pointed ears or horns, and little slits of eyes that glowed a baleful yellow as against the ruddy glow that seemed to illuminate, or perhaps to emanate from, the rest of the creature. . . .

The Farmer only got a momentary glimpse of this extraordinary thing, for almost instantly the gate burst into flames, and with a sort of hissing crackling noise coming from it the creature leapt down from the gate, and towards the Farmer—or towards the lantern that stood on the bricks behind him.

Farmer Branksome was no coward. He flinched again in the awful blast of heat that struck him, but all the same he took quick aim and lossed off both barrels at the Thing as it leapt towards him. The range was all-but point blank, and the Farmer was a dead shot. He could have sworn that both charges took the Thing full in the body, but it still came on, not heeding.

Then the Farmer let out a wild yell of sheer, panicky terror, and turned to run for his own backdoor. But the Thing behind him stretched out one of its long arms, and almost touched him. Instantly his clothing—he *himself*—burst into flames. He let out one long, agonised scream of intolerable agony, and fell prone by the backdoor. Then he lay still, burning and spluttering like a joint of meat that has by mishap fallen into the fire!

The Thing paused by the bright lamp on the bricks, and instantly it blackened, scorched and then ex-

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ploded with a loud report, scattering the blazing paraffin around. The Thing dabbled in these flames for a moment, then deserted them for the brighter and warmer fire—the body of the Farmer. But he, too, was almost consumed!

Hissing and crackling, the Thing went, in a couple of leaps, round the side of the house, just as Mrs. Branksome, roused by the reports and screams, looked anxiously out of her bedroom window. A moment later a

Then the farmer let out a wild yell of sheer panicky terror.

haystack on the other side of the house burst into a mass of flames, and the Thing, hissing and crackling with apparent satisfaction, burrowed into the fire like an animal seeking sanctuary in its burrow.

Seeing the glow, Mrs. Branksome hurried down and threw open the back door—but at sight of the charred, smouldering mess that had, a few minutes before, been her living, breathing husband, she sank on to the doorstep in a dead faint.

In a comfortable room, which in its furnishing looked something be-between the study of a literary man and the workroom of a scientist, two men sat on opposite sides of the fire, which (for May was a singularly cold month that year) glowed in the grate. Each was equipped with a good, stiff whiskey-and-soda, and one had a cigar while the other smoked a cheap gasper with apparent enjoyment.

They were strangely contrasting types—the one with the cigar, tall, lean and hatchet-faced, with the high, slightly receding forehead and thoughtful eyes of the intellectual, the other shortish, square-built, with a rather fat and good-humoured face which was rather belied by keen, hard eyes and a determined and pugnacious jaw.

Nor did the difference between them end with their appearance, for temperamentally they were just as divergent. Yet they were good friends, and had been ever since one night two years before when the short man, representing the police, had stood during a raid on a West-end night-club, by the solitary table of the tall one, and the tall one, glancing at the open notebook in the other's hand, had announced, in a singularly deep and sonorous, but not unpleasant voice:

"My name is—Doom . . . !"

The other had stared at that, and then said, in harsh, staccato tones:

"You don't say, buddy? Wal, I guess I got you there—and *I* don't mean perhaps, either! *My* moniker's Death!"

The other man glanced up at him with soft, almost luminous brown eyes, that looked amused:

"Yep!" snapped the stout man.

" Detective-Sergeant Death, that's my label at the Yard! And now, I'd like your *real* name, please!"

The tall man suddenly grinned, almost boyishly:

"Your name really *is* Death?"

"Sure! I've just told you!"

"Then why doubt that mine is Doom? After all, it's hardly more sinister!" And then he suddenly chuckled.

" What's biting you?" asked the detective, suspiciously.

"Only I was thinking how pretty it would be if we went into partnership — say in an undertaker's business! Think of the facia sign: 'DEATH & DOOM. FUNERAL FURNISHERS'!"

They had, in a way, gone into partnership eventually But not in an undertaking business. For Detective Sergeant—now Detectiv-Inspector—Death had discovered that Doctor Despard Doom was a celebrated psychist and psychical research-worker—sometimes he called himself a "Ghost Detective." And on at least two occasions he had been of considerable assistance in solving problems which, owing to their entirely uncanny nature, had been outside either the scope or the skill of the Yard.

And so, as soon as they were settled down in their respective arm-chairs, Doom asked, quietly:

"And what is it this time, Stanley?"

They had long since decided to call each other by their christian names as being less startling for other people—as the detective had said, you can't run about all over the place shouting for either "Death" or "Doom" without causing something of a sensation!

Now the Yard man looked sharply at his host, his keen eyes twinkling:

"Say, how the hell d'you know I wanta talk turkey?" he inquired.

The other grinned:

"Oh, is it Turkey? I thought it was American—or, rather, Bowery! Anyway, I smell you're in trouble—so out with it. What's the nature of the alleged crime, for a start?"

"Murder and arson!"

"Go on. It sounds as though it might be interesting!"

"It sure is! Listen, Despard . . .!" Death took out his notebook and flicked the pages. "In Sussex there are three small villages—or, rather, one town, one village, and one hamlet. They are called the Pendletons, collectively — Pendleton Magna, Stoke Pendleton, and Little Pendleton!" It was noticable that Stanley Death had, for the moment, dropped his American accent, and was speaking as he did in Court—officially.

Doom nodded:

"That's right! Between Lewes and Horsham—charming, old-world little places!"

"Hugh! I'm not so sure about 'em being so *charming*, just now. Not Little Pendleton, at anyrate!"

"Indeed? What has happened?"

"Quite a lot!" He referred to his notebook. "First, on the night of March 25th, about midnight, Pendleton Manor, belonging to Mrs. Emily Slane, widow—a large old manor-house of three wings, one modern—caught fire and was burned out. In addition to Mrs. Slane, there seem to have been six visitors, and, for some reason, they all seem to have been gathered in a big old attic-room at the top of the house. Mrs. Slane, and her nephew, Charles—who is a reporter on the *Daily Lightning*—were got out unconscious, and are now in hospital. The other five guests were all burned to death. Four of them

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have been identified as Rupert Snieckel, Jewish financier, his wife, Rachel, Henry Laidlaw, an author, and a Miss Renfrew, daughter of a wealthy shipowner. The fifth—a man—has not yet been identified. The servants, who were in the kitchen on the ground floor, all escaped safely, though some of them were a trifle scorched!"

Doom's acute mind struck the salient point immediately:

"They seem to have been a long time discovering that there was a fire on!" he commented.

"Just so!" agreed Death. "And that's where the funny business starts. The butler says he crossed the hall a few minutes before they smelt smoke and heard the flames crackling and there was then no sign of fire. Yet, when they rushed from the kitchen. the main staircase was well alight, and the drawing-room was blazing! How do you account for that? And the next thing was that the insurance company sent experts down to view the wreckage, and then refused to pay because the experts found evidence that the house had been fired in about a dozen different places, simultaneously, or almost simultaneously. They said that it was as though someone with a torch had just run around, setting light to one room after another!"

He paused. Doom was sitting forward in his chair, and there was a light of interest in his queer, brown eyes:

"Ah!" he murmured. "That sounds interesting!"

"It is!" snapped Death, rather grimly. "But that's only the half of it! Now, it has since been discovered that a number of small fires occurred sometime during the following day or night in some adjacent woods. As the weather was wet at the time, these fires could hardly have been either natural or accidental! But on the 27th a far more mysterious and serious matter occurred. A Farmer Branksome was the tenant of Middlemarch Farm, which belonged to the Manor. On the night of the 27th he was tending a sick cow. Early in the morning of the 28th, the local police-officer, on his beat, saw from a distance that one of the hay-stacks on this farm was well alight. He summoned the Pendletons Fire Brigade—a volunteer concern—and then hurried to the scene on his bicycle. He found the backdoor of the farm open, and the farmer's wife lying in the doorstep unconscious. A yard or so away lay a charred mass which was later identified as all that was left of the farmer. He had been literally burned to a cinder! Near him lay the scorched and broken remains of his double-barrelled gun, which had been discharged—both barrels. Nearby was found the remains of a paraffin stable-lamp, which had exploded. The first thing that struck the constable as curious was that the backdoor was scorched and blistered in a way that could only have happened if it had been exposed to the most intense heat—yet neither the burning farmer nor the lamp could have caused such heat, and the haystack, which might have done so, was on the other side of the house! To be brief, the other curious features were—how did the farmer get burned like that? The obvious solution, that the lantern exploded in his hand and set his clothes alight would not account for his body being consumed as though it had been for some time in the heart of a big fire! Furthermore, the lantern proved to be a Smith Patent one. I have been to Smith's

factory, and they have demonstrated to me that it is impossible, in any circumstances, for one of their lanterns to explode except under one condition—that of intense heat, such as could only be produced by putting it into a furnace, or something like that! When the widow recovered she stated that she had been aroused from sleep by screams, and the sound of shots. *The screams started before the shots, and continued afterwards.* She went to the window and looked out. She says the yard was lit up by what she describes as a sort of "ruddy glow," too strong to be accounted for by the light from the remains of the exploded lamp, which she saw lying in the middle of the yard. She says that she just caught sight of something like a ball of fire, disappearing round the corner of the house. She rushed down to the back-door, and opening it saw for the first time the remains of her husband, still smouldering. At that she fainted!"

A curious change had come over Doom. He was leaning forward in his chair, his face tense with excitement, and the look in his eyes was that of a hound on the trail.

"By Jingo!" he murmured, softly. "I fancy you're on something really big this time, Stanley!"

"I don't know about being *big*!" the detective grumbled. "But I know it's infernally puzzling, and I'm getting my knees caned by the Old Man for not making an arrest—or even getting a clue. But there just *aren't* any clues!"

Doom smiled:

"Aren't there? It seems to me there are plenty—if you look for them from the right angle! But—has anything else happened?"

"Quite a lot! On the 28th—29th—the night following the death of the farmer—there was a big fire in Pendleton Woods. The woods are extensive, covering best part of thirty acres, and that night five of 'em were completely burned out. And it was a wet night, after a succession of wet days lasting for nearly a fortnight, and everything was sopping wet! So how the darned stuff burned—big trees and little trees and undergrowth—is about as tough a mystery as I've struck yet. Unless someone poured about a thousand gallons of petrol over the lot!"

"I hardly think that happened!" commented Doom, quietly. "Anything further?"

"The whole thing was so darned mysterious that we were called in the following day and I was given charge of the case—worse luck, it's putting grey hairs on me! But nothing more happened until four nights ago. Since then there's been a fire on each night—first a coppice that lies between Stoke Pendleton and Little Pendleton—burnt right out; then an old wooden cottage on the edge of the Manor estate—been in a state of ruin for some years; the next night it was a petrol station on the road between Little and Stoke Pendletons—that exploded without any assignable cause. And finally—perhaps queerest of all—the whole of a hedge running alongside a five-acre field belonging to the dead Farmer Branksome. The whole hedge was burned almost from end to end, just as though someone had gone along it with a torch, deliberately setting it alight. And all the evidence shows that the hedge burned *against* the wind! That's to say that the fire started at the south end of the hedge, and progressed to the north end, when the wind was blowing dead from the North!"

Doom nodded, quickly:

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"Very significant!" he commented shortly. "And so is the fact that nothing happened between the 28th of March and the 30th of April—I *think*!"

" Is it—why?" asked Death, curiously.

Doom had pulled out a pocket-diary, and was consulting it:

"Yes—as I thought!" he said, as though to himself. Then, to Death: "Because on the 28th March the moon had almost waned, and on the 30th April it was past its first quarter again!"

"Meaning that—well, whoever's responsible for all this likes to work by moonlight?"

"You can put it that way if you like," Doom smiled. Then he asked: " Have you any clues, theories, or notions, Stanley?"

The other made a gesture, almost of despair.

"Hardly anything! But there's one thing that seems to me suggestive."

"And what is that?"

" Practically all the trouble has occurred on the Manor estate—beginning with the destruction of the Manor itself. Looks like some person or persons with a grudge against the Slanes?"

But Doom shook his head:

"As you would say yourself, better forget it, Stanley! I don't think there is any connection; Now, has it occured to ask any questions?"

"Heavens above, man—I've done nothing but ask questions! But they haven't got me anywhere!"

"No? Perhaps you haven't asked the right ones. For instance—and this is very important—what was the Slane party *doing* in the attic room that night?"

The detective shook his head:

"Don't sound important to me, buddy—but I sure did ask the servants about that. But they didn't know much—the butler thought they were playing some sort of game'!"

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised!" said Doom, grimly. "And a very dangerous sort of game at that, if I'm not mistaken! But haven't you got any statements from the two in hospital?"

"Not yet! Mrs. Slane's better, but her mind's gone west—they're afraid she's for the looney-bin when she leaves the hospital. Young Slane's not capable of answering questions, as yet!"

"Another important thing—what's the temperature like at Little Pendleton?"

The detective stared:

"Don't see what you're getting at. But all the time I was there it was unusually mild—close, even—for the time of the year!"

"While," said Doom, quietly, "all the rest of the country was suffering from a cold snap! Doesn't that strike you as at all significant?"

The detective stared again:

"Hadn't thought of it, to tell you the truth!"

Doom said nothing, but leaned over to his desk and pressed a bell. The pale, thoughtful-looking young man who was his secretary answered it:

"Simpson, I want you to phone the police stations at Stoke Pendleton, Little Pendleton, Pendleton Magna, Lewes and Horsham. Just ask them what the temperature outside is at the moment, will you?"

The secretary looked startled:

"Won't they think I'm mad, Sir?"

Doom grinned like a schoolboy:

"Tell them it's Detective-Inspector Death, of Scotland Yard, who wants

the information. That will explain it to them!"

The secretary vanished. Stanley Death glared:

"D'you have to show me up before your underlings? I've a mind to give you a poke in the puss, my son!"

Before Doom could answer the telephone shrilled. Doom answered it.

"Yes, he's here, alright!" He passed the receiver to Death. "For you—urgent, from the Yard. Good job I've got two lines!"

Death took the receiver, and as he listened to the message his face paled and grew very grim:

"Alright! I'll get busy, right away!"

He was apparently about to replace the receiver, but it seemed that whoever was at the other end had something more to say. Death's expression changed to one of ordinary interst, and he asked, sharply:

"Oh, yes—and who was he?"

He listened to the reply, and then asked:

"Was he definitely traced to Pendleton . . . ? Oh, I see—right you are! G'bye!"

He hung up, and turned to Doom:

"That was the Yard. They've identified the sixth guest—and the fifth corpse. He was a man named Felix Haanson—at anyrate, that's what he called himself. He claimed to be a clairvoyant—a medium. The Yard had their eye on him for fortune-telling—he got one conviction. That's why they've been so long in reporting him missing, I guess. Now our people have traced him to Pendleton Station, where he was picked up by a car from the Manor. He's not been heard of since!"

The expression on Doom's face was one of interest, not unmixed with a sort of regret:

"I thought as much!" he nodded, almost sadly. "That's what those—fools—were doing up in that attic—holding a *seance*! And this is the result of it!"

"You mean that you think they've—well, sort of *conjured up* something?"

Doom nodded, with extreme gravity:

"Like many amateurs—foolish and ignorant dabblers in such matters—they tried a materialisation. And they succeeded only too well!"

Death made a grimace, indicative of disgust:

"Hells bells! Is *that* all . . . ? And I thought I was on to a real good, juicy murder!" he growled, disgustedly.

Doom shot a glance at him:

"Let me tell you, my friend," he said, slowly, "that you have hit on something more serious in its results, both actual and potential, than any murder you've ever heard of or thought about! A force has been created, and is now abroad, loose and untrammelled, which has already been responsible for the loss of six lives, has apparently caused the destruction of one mind, and very considerable damage to property, and which, unless it can somehow be stopped, might easily result in the destruction of the whole of the country, and the death of every soul in it!"

Death stared until it looked as though his eyes would pop out of his head:

"Say, what are you trying to pull on me, Despard?" he managed to gasp, at last.

Doom looked at him, and his eyes were hard and unsmiling:

"I'm not trying to pull anything on you, as you put it!" he replied.

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"Answer me this—have you ever known me to lie, or even to exagerrate, in such matters as this, in all the time you have known me?"

Death continued to stare, and then, after a moment, slowly shook his head:

"No, I'd say not!"

"Then you can surely take it that I'm not doing so now! It would, in fact, be impossible to exaggerate or to over-estimate the danger that is now facing this country—and not only this country, but humanity in general—though, thank goodness, this is an island, and I don't see how this Thing could cross the ocean!"

Death went on regarding his companion for a moment in sheer amazement, and realised that it was impossible to disbelieve him. Then he let go his held breath in a long whistle, and ejaculated:

"And so—what?"

"We have got to deal with this Thing—hunt it down and destroy it! That's what!"

"And how do we manage that?"

Doom shook his head, gravely:

"I can't say, as yet. I must make plans. I must get down to this place—have a look at the Thing—and then see what can possibly be done! It won't be easy—and it won't be safe!" He paused for a moment, and then went on, this time without looking at the other: "See here, Stanley—this affair is right outside your line of business, and right inside mine. And it's going to be more than ordinarily risky, for here one is dealing with forces that are superhuman, if not actually supernatural. I should say the chances of destruction for the investigator are—well, at least twenty-five to one *on*! So, if you like to leave it to me . . . !"

Death interrupted sharply:

"You can can that stuff, Despard! I've brought you into this, and I'm seeing it through with you, whatever it means. Got that?"

Doom looked at him again, then, and his strangely luminous eyes were smiling approval:

"Thanks, Stanley!" he responded quietly. "I was sure you'd feel like that about it! And now, there is no time to be lost . . . !"

"Oh, by the way," Death's voice was crisp and matter-of-fact again—he was plainly relieved that the moment of sentiment was over. "There's something you don't know about yet—there's been another happening at Little Pendleton. That's what they rang me up from the Yard about, really . . .!"

Doom became tense and anxious:

"Yes?" he asked, sharply. "What it is? Someone else killed?"

"No, not so bad as that. It only happened an hour or so ago. The local police—I've had some extra men drafted in, of course—reported it to the Yard. So far as I can gather there's an old house not so far from the Manor. The people there were startled, an hour or so ago, by screams coming from the kitchen. When they went to have a look they found the only maid-servant—a middle-aged woman—in a dead faint on the kitchen floor. The place was terrifically hot, and there was a smell of burning. Then they found that the wooden frame of the kitchen window was all charred, that the creeper covering that side of the house had all been burned away, and that an enamel jug, used in the kitchen, was lying on the ground outside and looked as though it had been in the middle of a fire! The woman hasn't come round yet—or hadn't when they reported. The doctor had said she'd

apparently met with a terrible shock."

Doom rose from his chair with a quick, decisive motion:

"There's no time to lose at all!" he announced, sharply. "We must get down there right away, Stanley, or more lives will be lost—to say nothing of damage to property. Can you get a car?"

Death, also by this time on his feet, nodded. He felt more at home when there was some definite action afoot.

"Sure!" he said. "I haven't got one here—came by taxi. But I shall have to go to headquarters, anyway, to see to one or two things, so I'll get one. Shall I get a driver as well?"

"No, we'll have Lin Foo, my own man. He may be useful in various ways, besides just driving. But listen Stanley—get a fast car—a powerful one—but with an all-metal body, if possible."

Death gave him a sharp glance:

"You mean . . . ?"

"One that is as little inflammable as possible!" answered Doom, grimly. "Now—I've a few things to do—must make some provisions in case anything happens to us. Can you be back in half-an-hour?"

"Betcha life I'll be right here!"

"Good! I'll be ready by then!"

Death hurried from the room.

When he got back, Doom was pacing up and down, dictating at a rapid pace to his secretary, who was taking the stuff down direct on a typewriter. Nearby stood a couple of packed suitcases. Doom had just concluded as Death came into the room:

"Right!" he was saying, crisply, to the secretary. "Now, give me the copies to sign while you address the envelopes. Mark them all to be delivered immediately on news of my death or disappearance. One to the Editor of the "Times," one to the Editor of "The British Journal of Science" one to the Secretary of the Society of Physical Research, and one to the Commissioner of Police. Got that?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Shan't be a minute now, Stanley!" Doom took the sheets of typescript—one original and three carbons. He read the top-copy, and then signed it, and the three carbons. He watched while the secretary slipped them into the envelopes and sealed them.

" Now, you know exactly what to do, Simpson?"

"Yes, Sir! By the way—about those temperature reports . . .?"

"Jove, I'd forgotten all about them, in the excitement!"

"Here they are, Sir!"

Doom took the neatly typed sheet, and glanced it over. Without smiling he gave a little nod, and then handed the sheet to Death:

"There you are!"

Death looked at the sheet, which read as follows:

Lewes ...	... 40	deg. Fahr.
Horsham ...	... 38	,, ,,
Stoke Pendleton	... 59	,, ,,
Little Pendleton	... 72	,, ,,
Pendleton Magna	... 60	,, ,,

Then he asked:

"And so what?"

Doom shrugged:

"Doesn't it strike you as singular that in an imaginary circle of, say, less than twenty miles, there should be so much difference in the temperatures? On the outskirts, Horsham with 38 and Lewes with 40 degrees about normal. Then Stoke Pendleton and Pendleton Magna so much warmer—and Little Pendleton *with twelve degrees more than either of its neighbours*?"

Death whistled, long and low:

"It sure does seem queer. But I don't see what you're getting at, Despard!"

"You will, before long, I fancy!" Doom assured him, grimly. "Come along!"

He picked up the suitcases and led the way. Death commented on the luggage:

"Kid yourself you're going to a house-party, or something?" he asked.

"It's not clothes—munitions of war!" Doom answered, shortly, over his shoulder. In the hall he shouted: "Lin Foo . . .!"

As silently as a shadow a thin Chinaman, wearing the conventional chauffeur's uniform, appeared as though from nowhere and took the suitcases from his master's hand:

"Both inside the car, Lin!" Doom directed, shortly. "Then we're going to Little Pendleton — near Horsham. We have to go through Horsham—and go as fast as the blackout will let you!"

The Chinaman bowed, and led the way to the car.

On the way down Death tried to talk, but Doom cut in with:

"Shut up, Stanley! I've got to think, and this darkness helps!"

And after that he never said a word but smoked endless cigars, one after another, until they reached Horsham.

Then he indicated the outside, where it was snowing slightly, and a thin film of white covered the ground.

"That's interesting!" he commented.

"Why?" asked Death, surprised.

"You'll see!" was the enigmatic reply.

They had to pass through Pendleton Magna to get to Lttle Pendleton, and as they approached that town Doom said:

"Now—watch the snow!"

The moon was sinking—it was near midnight—but there was still enough light, especially with the reflection of the snow, to see fairly well by. Death stared out of the window, then he said, suddenly:

"Hullo, what's happened? It's got darker!"

Doom chuckled in the darkness of his corner:

"Not really!" he said. "There's no snow here—that's all! It's too warm for it to lay!"

"Great snakes! That's queer, isn't it?"

"Can't you feel it's warmer—even in the car?"

"Now you mention it, I can! But, say, what's it mean, Despard?"

"That apparently—at the moment—this is a very warm district!" answered Doom, with a queer, almost apprehensive, note in his voice. Then he added: "Which reminds me—we're in the danger zone, now! Better be prepared . . .!"

He flashed his torch, and by its light opened one of the suitcases. From it he took a couple of objects, and handed one to Death:

"Here, take this!"

"What the devil is it—some sort of gun?"

"Yes—a kind of super-water-pistol. Only it's charged with a special fire-extinguishing chemical. Keep it on you always—and if anything comes near you that—well, that *glows* and feels *hot*, aim for the centre of it with that—and keep your finger on the trigger!"

Stanley Death drew a long, sighing breath:

"Okay! I get you—up to a point!" He put the pistol away, and a few minutes later said: "We're almost

there. What's the first move?"

"See if that servant that fainted can talk!"

"Okay!" He gave some directions to Lin Foo through the speaking-tube, and shortly after they ran into a small village and pulled up outside what looked like the schoolhouse:

"Our temporary police-station!" grinned Death. "I'll go in and see what's doing, shall I?"

"Yes. Don't forget, if she can stand it, I want to see that girl as soon as possible!"

"Okay!"

In a very few moments Death

The woman started at his touch and showed the whites of her eyes like a frightened horse.

emerged from the police-station again accompanied by a young constable in uniform, who got up beside Lin Foo. Death jumped in beside Doom.

"We're lucky!" he announced. "She's recovered consciousness, and the doctor says she may talk—just a little! My chap will show us the way!"

They drove fairly slowly for about five minutes, then pulled up outside a long, low-built, old-fashioned building, which might have been classed as a large cottage or a small house.

"Pheww-w-w . . . ! But it's close!" growled Death, as he got out of the car. He pulled off his overcoat as he spoke. Doom got out, and stood, sniffing the air.

"Can you smell anything, Stanley?"

The other sniffed also, and then said, hesitatingly:

"Yes—and no! No sort of smell I could define, but a sort of vague—what shall I call it——a *musty* sort of smell!"

"Yes. Rather like the smell that comes from a blazing furnace!" suggested Doom.

"By heck, you're right!"

They were admitted by the lady of the house, who looked rather white and shaken, and taken straight upstairs to a small bedroom. A middle-aged man was waiting there, beside the bed:

"She's had a nasty shock!" he whispered, drawing them aside for a moment. "I understand that a statement from her is important, but make it as brief as possible. Then I'll give her something to send her to sleep!"

"Very well Doctor!" Doom agreed quietly.

Then he turned to look at the figure in the bed, and was a trifle surprised to see that it was that of a tall, raw-boned woman of late middle-age, wth a hard, eminently practical face. Not the sort to be easily frightened, he told himself, but he noted the look of fear in the quick-moving, restless eyes, and the tremulousness of the mouth.

He took a chair and sat down by the bed, laying one of his hands over that of the patient, which was rest-

lessly picking at the sheet:

"Now," he said, in a very gentle voice. "Don't disturb yourself too much, but I want you to tell me, as briefly as you can, just what it was that scared you, will you, please? Just how it happened, you know!"

The woman had started at his touch, and showed the whites of her eyes like a frightened horse. But his touch and his voice seemed to sooth her almost instantly, just as a frightened horse may be soothed in the same manner.

All the same she caught her breath and her eyes looked wildly round the room with a fear in them that was not pleasant to see:

"It ain't about, Sir—It can't get at me, can it?" her voice was no more than a hoarse croak.

Doom held her hand and, leaning over her, looked steadily, straight into her eyes.

"You are quite safe," he said, very slowly. "You have nothing to fear at all. Do you understand?"

Immediately, as though by magic, the fear went out of her eyes, and the very lines on her hard face seemed to soften.

" Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand . . . !" she heaved a great sigh of relief as she said that.

"Then tell me," Doom went on, in the same slow, monotonous tone, "just what happened to-night!"

Immediately she started to speak:

"I was in the kitchen. I was doing some washing. I noticed that it was terribly hot, and it seemed to get hotter. Never felt anything like it for this time o' year, Mister. So I didn't worry about no blackouts, I just run the blind up and opened the window. But the air what come in seemed to be hotter than the air what was inside. I thought we're going to have a rare storm. I put some more hot water in the washbowl, and then it was too hot. So I went to the pump and got some cold water in the big enamel jug. By then the heat was so bad I felt quite faint. And then, as I passed the window on my way back—I—saw —It . . . Oh! . . . Oh . . . !"

The fear had come back into her eyes, and her hands clutched wildly at Doom's sleeves as he bent over her.

"Hush!" he adjured her, in that same low, level tone. "You are quite safe—there is nothing to fear! Nothing at all! Tell me just what you saw . . . ?"

The woman became calm again, instantly;

"I dunno *what* it was, Mister! It warn't like nothing human, nor yet like any animal, as I ever heard tell of. It was outside the window, a yard or two away, and it was looking in, right at me, Mister. Like a goblin, it was—or summat in a nightmare. Round it was, like a globe—like a globe as has got a light inside it—or like as though it was red hot. Round, with no hair on it at all. Just two little pointed ears, like a cat's, and a round hole for a mouth. But it hadn't got no nose and it's eyes—they was awful, Mister! Slits, they was, and all plain yellow inside—no pupils nor nothing! Yellow, like a cat's—and yet not like a cat's, -because they seemed to flicker, like yellow flame might flicker. And the heat that come from it was like the heat what comes from a great furnace—I could feel it scorching my face and singeing my hair. And then I screamed—and not hardly knowing what I was doing like, I threw the water outer the jug right at it. And it hissed and sizzled like red-hot iron, and steam went up from it. And then I yelled out again,

an threw the jug right at it. And then I fainted, and I never knowed no more! Mister—it ain't coming back, is it . . . ?"

"No, it will never come back. Now, just close your eyes and go to sleep —to sleep—to sle-e-e-ep . . . !"

Doom fixed his eyes intently on hers until, in a moment or so, her lids became heavy and drooped slowly until they were quite closed, and her breathing became regular. Then Doom rose and turned to the watching medico:

"I don't think your opiate will be needed, after all, Doctor!" he whispered, with a smile.

"Well, I'm damned!" said the Doctor, staring at the peacefully sleeping form in the bed.

"She'll be alright until well into to-morrow!" said Doom, as they left the room. "Now," he said to Death, "we'll just have a look at the outside!"

They went round the outside of the place with their flash-lamps. The building was very solidly constructed of flints, in the good old Sussex style, and looked quite normal until they got round to the back, where they found one window, still open, with the wooden frame badly charred. And the creeper that had grown up the side of the house was just a ragged mass of charred tendrils, while the flint wall was blackened as though a bonfire had been built against it!

"Observe the height of that window!" said Doom. "The Thing was standing a yard or two away, looking straight in it. And there's nothing here it could have stood upon. That means the infernal Thing is about seven feet high!"

"Unless It was floating off the ground!" suggested Death.

Doom flashed his torch on the ground.

"No!" he observed. "Look—there are It's footmarks!"

He pointed to marks on the cobbles as though little fires had been burning there.

"Ah!" exclaimed Death, with satisfaction—this was in his line!

For a few moments he ran around with his nose almost on the ground, like a hound on the scent. Then he exclaimed:

"But, by heck, if that's so, the Thing takes about twelve-foot strides!"

"It doesn't stride—it leaps!"

Suddenly the silence of the night was broken by the loud ringing of a cracked bell, and Death exclaimed, sharply:

"Hell's bells—here's more trouble. That's the local fire alarm . . . !"

Even as he spoke there sounded along the road the roaring of a motor cycle, coming towards them at high speed. They ran round to the front of the house just as the cycle reached the gate, and a uniformed constable saw them and shouted:

"Inspector Death, Sir—there's a car blown up and burning on the Horsham Road! The Sergeant sent me to tell you . . . !"

"Right!" snapped Death. "Come on Despard . . . !"

They ran together for the waiting car, and Lin Foo, seeing them coming, started his engine.

Just about the time when Death had been listening to the servant's story, young George Purvis and his girl were on the way back from a dance at Horsham in his car. At a quiet spot on the road between Pendleton Magna and Little Pendleton they stopped for a few moments, as young people will, for a little

dalliance. Young Purvis was a careful driver, and with all the police there were about Little Pendleton just then it wasn't safe to drive while he cuddled his Doris, anyway.

So, for a few minutes, they cuddled and kissed. Then Doris drew away, and pushed the damp hair back from her forehead:

"George, how terribly hot it is!" she exclaimed. "We must be going to have a storm, or something!"

"It certainly feels like that," George responded. "Queer, though, because the sky's quite clear—not a cloud in it. But we'll soon get some air, if we open the windows and keep going!"

They lowered the windows, and he started up the car. But the air that blew in was hot, just like the blast from a furnace!

The Thing was coming along the road in pursuit of them at an incredible speed and in a series of leaps.

Suddenly Doris gave a little cry:

"Look! What's happening—there in front!"

George, peering ahead through the windscreen, saw a sort of glow behind the hedge at the top of the high embankment on the left of the road. Then came a streak of flame, and suddenly the hedge itself was on fire!

"Now, what the devil caused that?" George asked, as he braked.

Then Doris gave another cry:

"George! Look, what's that—in the fire . . . ? It—It's *alive*! George—It's coming out—O, God—*look at it* . . . !"

George looked, and was for the moment paralysed by what he saw. Emerging from the fire—making movements as though It was bathing in the flames, was an enormous Figure that could only be described in a nightmare! It stood seven or eight feet high, towering on top of the embankment like a gigantic and grotesque figure in red-hot metal!

For a glow came from It that was just as though it were red hot, and then, as It moved, small sparks flew from and played around It. George got an impression of a huge, rather nebulous-looking body, with short, twisted legs, and tremendously long, prehensile arms that hung almost to the ground. And on top a small, globular head, with little pointed ears, and eyes that were just slits of flaming yellow . . . !

Then Doris screamed again, and clutched at his arm in her terror, and young George came back to life and action. The Thing seemed to be staring at them—and crouching . . . No room—or time—to turn the car . . . Only one thing to do, then . . . !

George trod with all his weight on the accelerator, and the car shot forward. As it did so there came a blast of air so hot that George felt it scorch his face—smelled a strong odour of singeing . . . !

Then the little car shot under and past the Thing, and went roaring along the road, rapidly accelerating to the very top of its speed.

And after that the young couple might have been safe—but for one thing. As has been said, George was a careful driver—and he was very proud of his car. Since, in the blackout, the law would not allow him the powerful headlights he loved, he did his best by having a very bright rear-light—and that, as the car rushed along the road, glowed very bright and very red. The Thing on top of the embankment saw it, and leapt down into the roadway.

Doris, glancing back through the rear window, screamed:

"Oh, God—It's coming after us!"

George snatched a hasty glance over his shoulder, and saw that she was right. The Thing was coming along the road in pursuit of them at incredible speed and in a series of leaps. As it came it glowed brightly, and a mass of sparks flew from it, so that it looked like a ball of living fire, from the centre of which two yellow eyes seemed to glare and flash.

Young George muttered an oath (he seldom forgot himself like that in the presence of ladies!) and trod on the gas for all he was worth. The little car was going all-out now—must have been nearly seventy to the hour—but the ruddy glow that illuminated its interior from through the back window increased, and the heat grew more terrible with it. George with the sweat pouring off him, felt that he was liable to faint at any moment. . . .

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whole car was enveloped in a mass of flame, and Doris started shrieking as though she were mad. They were in a long, straight stretch of road, now, and George, realising the hopelessness of it, let his foot slip from the accelerator, took his hands from the wheel and caught Doris in his arms, determined to protect her, as well as he could, to the last with his own body.

The Thing outside stretched out a long terrible arm—and with a roar the petrol-tank exploded and the little car was wrapped in a huge sheet of flame. Just for a second the voice of George joined that of Doris in a long drawn-out shriek of agony—and then there was silence, except for the roar of the flames, in and out of which the unnameable Thing danced as though in triumph . . . !

Death pointed to the twisted, glowing remains of the little car, and whispered:

"You see, it never *hit* anything! It's right on the crown of the road, with the front wheels dead straight! It just *went up* . . .!"

Doom nodded. He was staring, with a world of horror and sadness in his eyes, at the two charred things that had, so short a time ago, been living, breathing, happy people! Now they were crouched inside the front of the car, just clear of the steering wheel, charred out of all recognition, but still clasped in each other's arms.

"We can't get 'em out yet!" breathed one of the constables, in a choked voice. "Too hot!"

"That's right!" said the other, tonelessly.

Death, torch in hand, went running along the road, his eyes on the ground. In a minute or two he came back, the sweat pouring down his face.

"They're there, alright!" he whispered to Doom. "Those foot-marks—if that's what they are. Burned right into the tar-mac—about fifteen to twenty yards apart!"

With something of a wrench, Doom pulled his gaze away from the interior of the car, and went back to Death. At the first of the footmarks he stopped, and bent over it. The imprint was about eighteen inches long and resembled no sort of human foot. It was like a round pad, with long claws sticking out from it.

"Interesting . . .!" Doom muttered. Then, with an almost nervous glance round, he warned: "Don't flash that torch too much, Stanley—we might bring the accursed Thing down on us, if you do!"

"Hell!" gasped Death, and hastily switched off the torch. Then he said, with a note of strain in his voice: "What the devil *is* it, Despard? I've *got* to know, or I'll go crackers, I think!"

"I'll explain presently!" Doom answered. "Here comes the fire-brigade!"

They walked back as the brigade came dashing up. The engine was a small one, but modern, and the half-dozen firemen wore shrapnel-helmets. More of them followed in a car.

As they alighted and commenced to get the hoses out, one of the firemen caught his breath and then ran round the back of the car to peer at the number on it. Then he gasped:

"Oh, Christ! It's young George—and Doris . . .!"

Doom, who heard him, asked gently:

"Did you know him?"

The man stared at him, dully:

"He's—he was—my son! And the

other was his girl—Doris Fenton. A pretty kid, too! Oh, God! How'm I going to tell their mothers?"

"Hard luck!" murmured Doom, his voice soft with sympathy.

He was just turning away, when the fellow stopped him.

"You—you anything to do with this business, Sir?"

Doom gave him a sharp look:

"Yes—I'm here to do what I can about it. Why?"

"Then I got something I reckon I oughter tell you, Sir. I ain't said nothing about it afore, 'cos I reckoned I might get laughed at. But if it's going to help 'venge my poor boy, I reckon I don't care who laughs! It was like this, Sir . . . !

And he went on to tell of the night of the Manor fire, and what he had seen—" . . . the only thing I could liken it to at all was a great, red-hot monkey, Sir . . . !"

"Thanks" said Doom. "That's very useful information—you did right to tell me. I wouldn't mention it to anyone else, though—no need to scare people more than necessary, you know!"

"I get you, Sir!" Purvis agreed, dully.

They played the hoses on the wreck of the car, which hissed and spluttered for a few seconds, then stopped. Then they commenced to get the bodies—or what was left of them—out. . . .

Doom and the detective got a couple of rooms at the local inn, where they found everyone up and about, for the whole village had been roused by the fire-bell. In Doom's room the Yard man, white-faced and nervous as a cat, demanded once more:

"What in hell's name is this accursed Thing, Despard! Is it a man, a beast, or a spook, or what the hell . . . ?"

"Actually, it's none of them!" Doom sat on the edge of the bed and lit a cigar. "It's an Elemental—if you know what that is?"

"I—I thought it was a sort of spook—if there *is* such a thing!"

"Seems to me you're getting pretty good proof that there is!" said Doom grimly. "Well, to explain it as briefly as possible, an Elemental is a sort of natural—or *super*natural — paradox. It is nether animal, nor vegetable, nor mineral, yet it has life—of a sort! Perhaps the best way I can describe to you just what it is, is to say that an Elemental is an active force that lie behind the element—earth, air, water—or *fire*! And this Thing we are dealing with is a Fire-Elemental. I have said it has life, but it is the lowest of all living organisms—lower even than the jelly-fish. It is without intelligence, but has a sort of crude instinct. It's life-force is precarious, and it has an instinct to preserve that life—that is about all. I do not think—nay, I am sure—that it is not intentionally malignant or dangerous, but that doesn't make it any the less so, when in pursuit of the satisfaction of it's one instinct—to continue to live and to grow!"

Doom paused for a moment, and the other asked, quickly:

"How do you mean, Despard?"

"Well, as the human or animal creature lives by gaining sustenance from food, so these things must have sustenance from the element they represent. Thus a Water-Elemental must have water, and a Fire-Elemental fire. And, unfortunately, they possess the power to create the very element that will sustain them. This Thing must have fire—and so we have

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the various unfortunate events that have happened here in Little Pendleton during the last few weeks! For example hungry for sustenance—that is, fire—this creature saw—or sensed—the brightness of Farmer Bransome's lantern, and came to it, with the awful results we know of! Similarly, it saw the glow from the open window of that cottage—and in the case of the car I suppose it saw the lights, and followed them!"

"Cripes!" breathed the detective. "But how did the accursed Thing come here at all, anyway?"

"Usually," Doom explained, "Elementals are deliberately called into being by magicians who need to use their terrific powers for their own ends. How terrific such powers can be, when directed by a superior intelligence, you can possibly imagine! Occasionally, however, they have been called into being by the ignorant fools . . ." here his voice grew harsh and bitter ". . . who call themselves 'spiritualists', and, after the manner of fools, rush in where angels fear to tread. Given the right conditions, it is possible for such people, at a *séance*, to materialise an elemental—and that, I have no doubt, is what has happened in this case. It has happened before—always with disastrous results. I may add that, at the present time, conditions are particularly favourable to such a materialisation. There is, to start with, the queer atmosphere of nervous tension into which these wretched wars have plunged the whole of Europe. Then, again, freshly spilled blood is always attractive to these creatures—and there is plenty of it being spilled at the moment! I have no doubt—and I shall confirm it to-morrow—that this Miss Slane and her cretinous friends, dabbling in forces they have no real conception of, tried a materialisation *séance—and they had a fire in the room*! If they had had a bowl of water, they might have conjured up a water-elemental; As it is—well, you see for yourself what has happened!"

Death was thoughtful—and startled. Used to such very concrete and human things as swindles, robberies and murders, this kind of thing made him feel very much at sea—and most unpleasantly helpless! At last he asked:

"Why doesn't the Thing do it's stuff in daylight—and why only when there's a moon?"

Doom shook his head:

"As to the first—I don't know. Possibly for the same reason that humans don't do very much at night-time, as a rule. Perhaps It's senses are more acute at night. As to the second—well, you know the effect the moon has on all sorts of natural functions, such as the weather, the tides, and so on. If it has an effect on the elements—as it undoubtedly does—then it is likely to have a similar effect on the active forces behind those elements, which we call Elementals!"

Death nodded, gloomily:

"I see—or don't I? Hell, Despard, you've about got me guessing, this time!"

Death rose, threw away the stub of his cigar, and yawned:

"Well, go along to bed and try to sleep it off. We must get *some* sleep—I forsee a busy day to-morrow!"

The following morning—or, rather later on the same one—Doom started by quietly taking command, and issuing his orders to the Scotland Yard man which the latter, used to obey as well as to command, and fully recog-

nising that only Doom could handle such a matter as this, took like a lamb.

"Get your fellows busy to-day. Go round and warn everyone in the village that the blackout regulations are going to be inforced very strictly for the next few days. Not a light to be shown in any window, and no torches to be used outside except in an emergency. Warn all those with cars not to travel in them after dark. And warn them that it will be better for everyone to keep indoors after ten o-clock, and that, no matter how hot it gets, *no windows are to be* opened! I should also advise everyone to sleep on the ground floor, in case of fire! Now, somewhere in this district there must be a rocky place, where there is practically no vegetation. I want you to find out where there is any such place or places, and to warn everyone not to go near them for the present. It is in some such place that this Thing will have It's lair. Might be a good idea to picket it—during daylight, but not at night. That would be too dangerous for your fellows. And try to arrange for whoever's in charge of the firebrigade to have a crew on duty all night—from ten o'clock till daylight. I think that's all, for now!"

"Okay, Chief!" Death responded, with a grim smile.

There had been tension in the village of Little Pendleton for the past month, but that day it reached its climax. Already a number of those who could do so had gone away, and that day still more went. Many of the men who were more or less forced to remain there on account of their work sent their families away. So that the place was more than half-deserted, and the few inhabitants who remained walked about with white, scared faces and with constant glances over their shoulders. Fear—nameless fear of an unknown Thing—held the pretty little hamlet in thrall! And that fear was not lessened by the phenomenal heat that brooded, like some evil emanation, over the place all day.

Stanley Death spent a busy day carrying out Doom's instructions, reporting to headquarters (that was a tough job, too, in the circumstances —Stanley did not fancy talking to his superiors about "spooks" and "Elementals"!) and drafting in some more police, also getting them armed.

He and Doom did not meet until they had dinner together at the inn at about seven o'clock.

"Well?" was the detective's first question. "Any progress?"

Doom nodded, but with no great satisfaction:

"Quite a lot! I've verified my theory—and it's right! I went to see young Slane, the reporter, in hospital at Horsham. I had a chat with the house-surgeon, as one medico to another, and got permission to see and question him. He told me about the *séance*, and the Thing that came out of the fire. He said it was like a tiny dwarf, or a little monkey. Purvis of the firebrigade, saw it when he was putting out the fire—he described it as 'a great monkey'! The height of that kitchen window at the cottage, and the length of It's jumps, register it as about seven or eight feet high! Now, what do you gather from that?"

Stanley thought hard, but only managed to look puzzled. At last he shook his head:

"Not a darn thing!" he admitted, at last. "So what . . .?"

"As I suspected," Doom answered very gravely, "this infernal Thing is gaining in size and power with every fire! It started as a tiny thing, like a

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"Cripes, yes! And so what—what do we do about it . . .?"

"That is the great problem! But there is one comfort—a thing that has life—*everything* that has life—can, by some means or other, be deprived of that life! We've got to destroy this thing somehow—but the question is *how* . . .?"

After a moment's consideration, Stanley exclaimed:

"Hell, that ought to be easy—well, not easy, perhaps, but possible! If we got a regiment of soldiers and surrounded it, with rifles and machine guns and what not . . .?"

But Doom shook his head, wth a rather mirthless smile:

"You can't do it that way—that kind of thing is only effective with something that's got blood to run, and a heart to stop! This Thing has neither—nor any bones to break! All the bullets in the world will not destroy it. But it would soon burn up your regiment of soldiers—explode their ammunition — destroy them utterly!"

"Hell! I hadn't thought of it that way! Alright, then, I tell you what—bomb it, from the air, if necessary. Or put a mine under it, and blow it to fragments! How's that . . .?"

Doom looked at him, with wide, luminous eyes that had horror behind them:

"My God—do you realise what you'd do then? You've given yourself the clue when you say 'blow it to fragments'! I have told you it is the lowest possible living organism—well, an earthworm is a low organism. What happens when you cut an earthworm in half? It becomes *two separate earthworms*. Here you have one big Elemental—you blow it to fragments, and instead of the one big one you get numberless tiny ones. And each of them starts little fires, and gradually grows bigger and bigger . . .!"

"My God!" gasped Death. "We'd get a regiment of 'em . . . !"

"Exactly!" Doom agreed. "No, that's not the way, Stanley. But there must be a way, and that's what I've got to think out! But, for the moment, we must deal with the present and immediate danger. This moon has another three days to go—it rises at one o'clock to-morrow morning; so I calculate that, in three days time, the danger will be over until the moon reaches it's first quarter again—practically a month. That should give us time. But in the meanwhile, we've got to stop this Thing doing more damage! Now, have you located any rocky places?"

"Just one—that's all there is. An old, disused chalk-pit, about a couple of miles to the left of the Manor!"

"Then that will be where the Thing has it's lair, for a certainty. And, somehow or other, we've got to stop it from leaving that spot for the next three nights. After that we ought to get a rest until the moon comes again—which should give us some chance to think out a plan to destroy it!"

Death stared at him:

"But, hell, if the darned Thing's as dangerous as you say it is, how the blazes are we going to do that?"

"I'm not sure we can—but I've got an idea. Meanwhile, the first thing to do is to get a notion of the lay of the land—and we've just about got time to do that while the daylight still holds. But we must be quick—so come on!"

The car, with Lin Foo sitting by the wheel, like a yellow idol disguised as a chauffeur, was standing outside, and as he got in Stanley noted that the carrier and the interior of the car were loaded up with all sorts of packages.

"Where the devil did you get all this?" he asked.

"Oh, I've not been idle!" Doom answered. "I took the opportunity of running up to Town and making a few purchases—more munitions of war!"

With Stanley directing Lin Foo, they arrived at their destination in less than a quarter of an hour, and while the daylight was still full. They approached it by means of a narrow, rutty lane, which finally opened out and ended on a bare and obsolete stretch of heath, with a track across it which led to a huge cavity in the centre.

At this point the car was peremptorily halted by a uniformed constable with a motor-cycle—who saluted as Death stuck his head out of the window and asked:

"Anything to report, Jones?"

"Nothing at all, Sir!" was the reply. And then they drove on to the edge of the chalk-pit.

"Notice anything peculiar?" Doom asked, as they alighted.

"Only that it seems hotter than ever!"

"Just so!" said Doom, dryly. "We're closer to the—source of the heat!"

He stepped to the edge of the pit, and looked over. It was some hundred feet deep, with the sides absolutely sheer all round, except for a steep path just where they were standing, at a gap in the wooden railings which otherwise encircled the place.

The sides were a mixture of chalk and plain rock, and streaks of chalk could be seen on the rocky floor below, the chalk supply having petered out when the place had been excavated to that extent. Here and there, around the lower part of the sides, holes could be seen like good sized caves—evidently test-workings dug to see if any more chalk could be found. Doom indicated these with a sweep of his arm:

"Somewhere down there, he said, gravely, "this Horror of ours has it's hide-out. You can see plenty of traces of it, if you look." And he indicated where patches of moss and small bushes wer charred and burned, here and there. There were also marks on the path that led up to where they stood, which looked as though fires had been lit.

Doom examined the rocky walls carefully with the naked eye. Then he fetched a pair of binoculars from the car and examined them again through these. Finally he drew a big sigh, and announced, gravely:

"By the grace of God, there's only one way the Thing can get out of this pit, and that's by this path!"

"It can't climb, then?" Stanley asked, interestedly.

"It could climb anything that's climable, no doubt. But these sides aren't—except to a fly! They're sheer and smooth—not even a monkey could get up them! So all we shall have to do will be to stop it getting up this path!"

"That *all*?" There was a trace of sarcasm in Death's tone. "And how

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Doom regarded him steadily:

"I've got an idea about that, and I'm going to try the experiment to-night. But it wil be a very dangerous experiment, Stanley, so if you'd rather leave it to me . . .?"

"Can it!" growled the detective. "I've told you I'm with you in this—and I didn't mean perhaps, either!"

"Alright!" smiled Doom. "Keep your shirt on, Stanley!"

"Well, what do we do now?"

"Nothing—except get a little rest. Now, the moon rises at 3.5 to-morrow morning. That's the danger period, and we shall have to be back here by 2.45, to get ready. Meanwhile we'd better get some sleep—and a drink or two. I fancy we shall need 'em!"

"Right!" agreed Stanley, always the man of action. "Then come on!"

At about twenty minutes to three the following morning the car, with Lin Foo driving and Doom and the detective inside, bumped along the lane and halted on the edge of the strip of heath.

"We'll leave the car here!" Doom announced. " It'll be dangerous to have it closer, because of the petrol-tank—it might explode!"

"But suppose we want it for a quick getaway?" Stanley asked—he was feeling as nervous as a kitten (as he would have described it) but was trying hard to show no signs.

"We shan't!" Doom answered. "If that Thing gets us on the run the car won't be any more use to us than our legs! It can move at almost light-ning speed—remember that poor devil last night! *He* couldn't get away from it!"

"*Pah*!" muttered Stanley, and bravely repressed a shudder. Then he said: "What about the Chink—does he know what he's up against?"

Doom smiled in the darkness:

"Roughly, yes! But I may tell you Lin Foo fears neither God, man nor Devil, so you needn't worry about him!"

In the light of the cars headlamps, Doom made the others don complete overalls and gloves made of fire-proof and heat-resisting material, whch he had procured in London on his visit there. Over their faces they wore mica masks, with dark eye-glasses beneath to guard against glare. And each was armed with one of those peculiar liquid-discharging pistols, something like a sub-machine gun in shape, which Doom had pro-duced the previous day. They looked a weird, ghoulish trio as they made their way, by a faint glimmer of moonlight already showing, and the light of a single torch, to the edge of the chalk-pit.

Doom's directions were terse and to the point.

"Now, you know what we've got to do—keep the Thing from leaving this pit! I'm counting on you two as reserves—at the start you will leave me to deal with it alone! Luckily, as the moon is waning the Thing losses some of it's strength, but even so the great danger is that it will leap right over my head. In that case you will have to tackle it. So I want you, Stanley, to take your position about fifteen yards to my rear, and Lin Foo another twenty yards behind you. In that way, between us, we ought to effectively stop it—it won't be able to face these pistols for long. Aim for the centre of its body, and keep your finger on the trigger all the time. Do you understand?"

Stanley said: "Okey, Chief!" in a voice that he tried to make light and careless. Lin Foo, who was not

loquacious, merely bowed.

"But look here, Despard," Death objected. "I want to have a look-see! Hell, I may never have a chance to see another Elemental!"

"You may never have a chance to see anything else again—if we're not lucky!" retorted Doom, grimly. "Alright, you can stand here by me for the time being. But mark your place, and run back to it as soon as I tell you. See?"

"I get you!" was the curt reply. Then Stanley marked his station with a large lump of chalk, and took his stand by Doom right on the edge of the pit. Lin Foo stood some thirty-five yards in the rear, like a carved image. He did not seem to have any curiosity!

So, for a while, they waited. Then Doom drew his breath with a sharp hiss, and indicated by a gesture the less-than-a-quarter moon, as it showed up above a line of distant pine trees. There was no wind, and the whole world seemed to be wrapped in a grim and sinister silence. Not a sound of any sort could be heard—not even the distant barking of a dog, or the lowing of cattle. The pale light of the dying moon threw things into weird relief, and, in spite of himself, Stanley Death felt little shudders passing down his spine, and realised, angrily, that his knees were none to steady in their support of him.

"Hell!" he whispered. "This silence is getting on my nerves! Why the hell doesn't something *happen*!"

Doom was silent for a moment, then he said:

"It will, in a moment, I think! *Stand by* . . .!" he added, sharply.

Suddenly it seemed to Stanley that the heat grew greater, and the sweat commenced to run down his face inside his mask. At the same moment he became conscious of some sort of movement in the darkness of the pit below. Peering, he saw that a faint glow of light was emanating from one of those cave-like holes. It increased—and then he caught his breath sharply as a huge, nebulous, glowing Thing came crawling into view.

As It got clear of the hole, It erected Itself, and then Stanley got his first glimpse of the Flaming horror—a huge figure, grotesquely shapeless, that must have stood at least eight feet in height, according to his estimate. The glow that came from it was dull and ruddy, but he could see the shapeless, enormous body, the squat, mis-shapen legs, and the tremendously long, prehensile arms. He could distinguish, too, the comparatively small, globular head with the little pointed ears((like those of a huge cat—and then, as it turned, he was able to see quite clearly those yellow, sightless-looking eyes, so incredibly malignant and sinister in their blind glaring.

"*Christ* . . .!" he muttered, to himself, and had to use all his resolution to crush a desire to turn and run for his life. The Thing down there seemed to him to be the very incarnation of malignant evil itself . . .!

Then It commenced to move, in a sort of crawl on It's stunted legs, which was yet amazingly rapid. And it was with added horror that Death noted how it did not walk straight forward, like a human-being or a monkey, but moved with a horrible sideways motion, like that of a great crab.

"It's coming . . .!" Death managed to gasp, between his clenched teeth. The remark was unnecessary, but it was a relief to say something.

The Thing reached the bottom of

the path, and the heat came up at them in a terrific wave, like the blast from some great furnace. Then, with incredible rapidity, the Thing commenced to ascend the path, and Doom ordered, sharply:

"Back to your post—quickly!"

Stanley ran back to the place he had marked, and crouched there, gripping his pistol at the ready, and striving to control his trembling.

He saw Doom stretch himself at full length on the ground, his head projecting over the edge of the path where it sloped sharply—almost perpendicularly—downward. He could be quite plainly seen, silhouetted against the glow that was coming up from the pit. And now the glow was increasing in intensity, and the heat increasing with it, until Stanley felt his senses reeling: "God!" he thought. "I mustn't faint, whatever happens!"

He became conscous of a low, crackling sound—like the crackling of flames. Around the path, at the edge of the pit, the glow increased to a glare, and then he saw the dark figure, silhouetted against it, that was Doom, raise the queer looking pistol, and take aim.

Stanley held his breath—what would happen now . . .?

There came a sudden terrific hissing, as though an enormous piece of red-hot metal had been plunged into water. Against the glow a cloud of steam rose. Then the glow itself grew a trifle dimmer. Then Doom spring agilely to his feet, and against the glow Stanley could see that he was still keeping a steady stream from his pistol directed at the still invisible Elemental. More steam, which seemed to have an angry, flickering light behind it.

Suddenly Doom shouted: "Look out, Stanley—Lin Foo . . .!" and fell back a few paces. It seemed to Stanley that he staggered, and the detective braced himself and held his pistol ready.

Then, above the edge of the pit, that awful head and face came into sight. Surrounded by a dense cloud of steam, it was yet vaguely visible, and the detective could see the small ears moving spasmodically, while the yellow, sightless, slit eyes seemed to be flickering like lights in a draught. Then he saw Doom shift the stream of liquid full onto the centre of that face, and the face seemed to blur and grow shapeless. The hissing rose to a sound almost like a scream—then the Thing vanished again, and Doom, with a faint cry of: "See to it, Stanley!" suddenly collapsed, and fell on his face.

Death ran to the edge of the crater and peered cautiously over. The Thing had reached the bottom of the path, and seemed to be hesitating. The detective guessed that the pistol would not carry that far direct, but a drop-shot . . . though a hundred feet or so below him the Elemental was not more than three yards away on a straight line. . . .

He pressed the trigger, and in a moment got the range. As the liquid sprayed over the red-hot Thing below the steam rose in clouds, and the hissing was like that of a thousand snakes. . . . Then, finding itself still pursued by this unknown, unseen enemy, the Thing made a bee line for shelter in it's own cave. It still moved sideways, like a crab, but it seemed to Death that it moved more slowly. It struck him, also, that it had lost some of it's stature—grown smaller. . . . Then it reached the mouth of the cave, and was gone. Only a cloud of steam and a decreas-

ing glow were left, and in a moment or so those also had vanished—that deadly quiet brooded over the chalk-pit once more.

As Stanley, suddenly remembering Doom, turned away, he saw that Lin Foo was also standing on the edge of the crater, a few yards away. He stood very erect, only his head bent as he peered down into the depths, and it occurred to the detective that he did not look a bit like a chaffeur standing there. There was something *big*—a strange, almost godlike dignity about him. . . . "Hell," he thought, "this darn Elemental's giving me the jitters—I'm seeing things . . . !"

Doom had turned, and was half sitting-up, propped on one elbow.

"It's alright!" he said, a little faintly, as Stanley ran to his side. "It was only the heat—my God, I'm nearly cooked!"

The front of his grey fire-proof overall was scorched and blackened as though he had been in the heart of a fire, and his face behind the mica mask was so red that it almost scared the detective, who removed the mask, and then fanned him with it. The heat was still terrible, the air close and overpowering.

But Doom soon recovered, and got onto his feet. It was then that the Detective said, pointing:

"Look at that darned Celestial of yours—what's he up to?"

Lin Foo was still standing on the edge of the crater, staring down. He was rigid, and again it struck Death that he looked altogether bigger and taller than normally.

Doom walked across to him, and lightly touched his arm. It—and his whole body—was as rigid as though he had been just a figure carved from stone, nor did he take any notice of the contact. Doom seemed to be impressed.

"Lin Foo," he said to Stanley, "is what you might call an adept in matters psychic. At the moment his ego—soul, if you like—has gone on a journey elsewhere!"

"The devil it has!" was the Yard man's comment. "And now—what?"

Doom glanced down into the darkness of the pit with anxious eyes:

"I don't imagine our friend down there will venture out again to-night, and the moon will be gone shortly. But we'd better wait till it goes, in case . . . !"

So they sat down on a convenient boulder, and waited. Lin Foo continued to stand, rigid and immovable, on the edge of the crater. But just as the moon sank below the horizon a sort of tremor shook his body, and he took a couple of deep breaths. He seemed to awake from a sleep—or trance—and gave his body a little shake as he turned away from the edge. Behind the mica mask his yellow face was as impassive as ever. Then he turned to Doom, and, for once, spoke:

"The danger is over for to-night, Master!" he said, in perfect English. "Shall we go?"

Doom gave him a curious glance, and responded, quietly:

"If you say so, Lin Foo!"

They took off their overalls, and silently got back into the car. Doom only spoke once on the way back, then he said:

"I am not anxious to repeat to-night's little experience, Stanley. So let us pray for rain for the next two nights!"

If they did that their prayer was answered, for the following day it commenced to rain, and never stopped for the next 72 hours. The moon

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—what was left of it—was completely hidden behind heavy clouds, and the Flaming Thing remained, quiescent, in it's underground lair.

The days and the weeks passed, and once more the time of the new moon approached. And the nearer it came the more worried and harassed was Despard Doom. He spent a lot of time ranging the country, as though he was seeking something, and paid particular attention to rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and wells—anywhere where there was water. He went up to town continuously—spent hours digging into old tomes in the British Museum, and borrowed rare books in various languages from scientific friends—to none of whom would he give any hint as to what it was he was seeking.

He worked alone. Stanley Death had, for the time being, gone back to attend to other matters at the Yard, assured by Doom that there would be no further trouble until the coming of the new moon, while Lin Foo had humbly craved the privilege of three weeks leave, saying, when he asked for it:

"But I will most certainly be back before the time of the new moon, Master. And then it may be that I can help, for have you not a fable in which the mouse helped the lion?"

"If you can, Lin Foo," Doom had answered, "you will earn great gratitude from me, for assuredly I shall need all the help I can get!"

So he worked alone, still using the police-car, but with an official driver taking the place of the absent Lin Foo. One consolation he found in the fact that the phenomenal weather that was so affecting Little Pendleton and, to a lesser degree, the other two Pendletons as well, had, in the press of War news, excited no newspaper comment, which would probably have resulted in a publicity that would have been bound to hinder his efforts.

But for all that his efforts, becoming more frantic as the days passed and the new moon grew nearer, were singularly fruitless. Somehow, if tremendous loss of life and great damage to property was to be avoided, this infernal Thing that had been conjured into being by the ignorant dabbling of Mrs. Slane and her little circle must be destroyed! But just how to destroy it seemed a problem that even the capable brain of the greatest physic investigator of the day could not successfully deal with!

And then, just when the sense of his failure was bringing to his heart the icy clutch of despair, he received a telegram which, somehow, revived his hope, enigmatic though it was. It read:

"DOCTOR DOOM PLOUGH INN LITTLE PENDLETON. DAM RIVER NORTH OF CHALK PIT HAVE READY TWO DAYS BEFORE FIRST QUARTER MOON.—L.F."

In the first place this gave Doom a comforting sense that someone else —Lin Foo to wit—was working on the problem besides himself. In the second it gave him something definite to do just at the moment when he felt there was nothing left but to wait for the worst—a condition of mind, it may be mentioned, that seldom overtook Doctor Despard Doom.

He went straight out to look at the river. Just beyond the chalk-pit, as one approached it by the only path, the ground took a sudden steep slope, which ended in quite a pleasant little valley—a bowl shaped depression, of considerable extent, covered with

lush grass and split in the centre by a small river—little more than a good-sized stream, actually—which ran between steep, rocky banks.

In the summer, Doom decided, as he examined it with careful interest, it would probably be a clear, tinklng, gentle flow of water, and no doubt quite shallow. But at the moment it was running rapidly, and the water was thick and muddy, so that the depth could not be estimated by the eye.

Doom saw at once that to dam the stream would mean flooding the valley, so, he decided, it would have to be a dam that had a sluice in it, which could be closed at will when necessary. Already he had a faint sort of glimmering as to what Lin Foo was getting at, and he lost no time in putting the plan into execution. Luckily he had command of plenty of money, and was quite prepared to spend it in a cause of this sort, taking his chance as to getting it back again.

He was not prepared to trust local men. He got a contractor from Brighton, told him exactly what he wanted and when the work was to be completed, and told him that expense was no object. Then he telephoned Death at the Yard and told him to make sure that no local individual or body could interfere with the job.

After that there was nothing to do but wait—his only hope now being in whatever plan it was Lin Foo had in his mind.

Two days before the new moon was due Stanley Death arrived on the scene once more, and was aghast when he heard what Doom had to tell him:

"But hell, man!" he exclaimed, disgustedly. "Say, have we gotta just depend on what a blooming Chink chauffeur's got behind his slit eyes?"

Doom frowned faintly with annoyance, but replied in his usual even tones:

"In your profession, my dear Stanley, you should have learned not to judge things quite so much on their face-value! It is true that you have seen Lin Foo only as a servant—a chauffeur, in fact. But let me tell you that actually he is a great deal more than this—he is in his own country a scientist of considerable repute, an adept, and a magician of considerable power!"

"Sez you? Well, I guess that don't mean a lot in my young life! A great scientist in China may be just a bum in Europe—and as for the rest of it—magicians and all that—I guess that's just fairy-tale stuff, anyway!"

"Very well! But it's a fairy-tale, of sorts—and there are unpleasant ones as well as pretty ones, as you'd know if you'd ever read the Brothers Grimm—that we're up against and so perhaps fairy-tale methods are all we can use against it. In any case, Lin Foo is our last hope, so we'd better make the best of it!"

And after that there was nothing more to be said!

So Stanley Death sulked, and felt decidedly uncomfortable in his mind about things—a condition that was not decreased when he noted how worn and anxious his friend looked, despite his apparent faith in the Chinaman.

And then, on the day of the new moon, Lin Foo arrived. His method of arrival rather startled Stanley, too. For they had just finished dinner when, suddenly, Lin Foo was there—in the room with them! It was rather as though he had suddenly materialised from thin air, for Death, who

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senses were always alert had heard no sound of a car, and the nearest station was three miles away, while Lin Foo certainly did not look as though he had walked, apart from the fact that he was carrying a couple of heavy packages It was noticeable, also, that his manner and bearing were hard'y those of a servant, although he still addressed Doom with great respect.

"It is settled, Master!" was his greeting. "And I think that after a few days you need have no more anxiety. But if we are to be successful in the destruction of this Demon, brought into power by ignorant fools, there are certain things which must be carefully carried out. Of these I will tell you."

Lin Foo gave him a look which somehow made him feel incredibly small.

He turned to Death, and spoke with an air of commmand:

"You will see to it that, from tomorrow morning on, a guard of your men is kept all round the chalk-pit, and that no one is allowed to approach it, on any pretext whatever, whoever they may happen to be. And this guard must be set at least a hundred yards from the pit, and the men forming it must be instructed not on any account to approach closer than that to it, on pain of death. Do you understand?"

Death would much have liked to ask this Chink who the hell he thought he was giving orders to! But somehow, there was that about the fellow which stopped him from so doing. He contented himself with answering, with a slight smile:

"Yes, I understand, and I will see to it. But you must understand that in this country we do not punish such trivial offences with death!"

Lin Foo gave him a look from his slit eyes which, somehow, made the detective feel incredibly small. Then he answered, contemptuously:

"The offence would not be trivial—and the death would not come from you. But see to it, as I have said:

Then he turned back to Doom:

"Until the moon has reached it's first quarter, there is nothing you can do. But on that night, before the rising of the moon, you and this man here had better be on the edge of the pit, ready. Wear your fire-proof clothing, and take with you those weapons you used the last time. Your business will be to guard the path, and to see that the Demon does not mount it and escape from the pit, though I do not think he will be able to do so. But there is just a chance, and it must be guarded against. Now, Master, while you are there you will see strange things, it may be—but no matter what you see happening, *on no account must you interfere*! If you do, your lives will be forfeit, and all that I have accomplished and hope to accomplish will be ruined! And the Demon will stalk

abroad once more, to the destruction of your people and your land! Is that clearly understood, Master?"

Doom bowed hs head:

"I understand, Lin Foo, and all that you have commanded shall be done, even as you have said! But in the meantime . . .?"

"In the meantime you can only wait! For me, I must fast, contemplate, and make my final preparations. And for that I shall go to the pit itself!"

Here Death broke in:

"But hell's bells, man—you can't go down there! It—it isn't *safe* . . .!"

Lin Foo answered, with an inscrutable smile:

"It is safe enough—for *me*! There are other caves, besides the one that the Demon occupies. In any case, it is the only place for my purpose! Just see that your men do their part, and all will be well!"

Once more he turned and addressed Doom:

"It may be, Master, that after this we shall not speak again together. But there is one thing I would that you do. If I do not come back from the pit in my own person, there is a certain place you have where those afflicted in the head are cared for. It is called Bethlehem Hospital. There you will find a young Chinaman who up till now, has had no wits. But when you go you will find him better, and you will be able to secure his release. Do this, and he will serve you as faithfully as I have served you."

"That shall be done, Lin Foo!" Doom answered. "But cannot you tell me something of what you intend to do—to the advantage possibly of the Great Art we both practice?"

Lin Foo bowed his head for a moment and was silent. Then he said

"There are some secrets which cannot be revealed even to you O Master, and this is all I can tell you. This Demon that has been so thoughtlessly created can only be destroyed by those other Demons who are his natural enemies. He is the Demon of Fire, and his ally is the Demon of air, who can help him in his work. But the Demon of Water and the Demon of Earth—they can drown or stifle him! So it is their aid I shall invoke! Farewell, Master—and remember all I have said!"

And, with that, the Chinaman went as he had come—so swiftly and silently that even the quick eyes of Stanley Death could not be certain whether he had walked through the door in the ordinary way, floated up through the ceiling, or just disappeared into thin air!

"Well, I'll be eternally damned!" was the detective's comment, when he had gone.

"Yes," agreed Doom, quietly. "You probably will be, if you don't cultivate a more reverent mind, my friend!"

The days that lapsed before the coming of the moon's first quarter were, for Death, the most nerve-racking he had yet had to face. Despard Doom, too, was restless and inclined to be irritable, although he differed from Stanley in that he seemed to have no doubt about the result. He annoyed Stanley, too, by resolutely refusing to discuss the matter. Work on the dam was completed, and there was nothing whatever to do—so Doom played chess with Stanley, when the latter would agree, and darts with the yokels in

On the morning of the appointed day a note lay on the breakfast table addressed to Doom. When he opened

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it he found that it had neither address date nor signature, and read, simply:

"At mid-day to-day close the sluices of the dam. At 11 o'clock to-night take up your positions as directed, and dismiss the guard. Carry out my other instructions to the letter."

That was all, but there was, of course, no doubt as to who it was from.

At mid-day Doom and the detective went down to the newly constructed dam and Doom closed the sluice with his own hand. Immediately the muddy, turgid water commenced to pile against the dam and to rise rapidly. Death stared at it anxiously.

"Hell!" he exclaimed. "It'll flood the whole valley at this rate!"

"That is probably what Lin Foo wants! Doom answered.

A little before eleven the two friends were driven to the chalk pit by their police-driver, where Stanley dismissed the police picket and, on Doom's suggestion, sent their driver back with them. Stanley could drive the car back himself.

They then donned their overalls and masks, took their water-pistols and went to their old station on the path at the edge of the crater.

The great hole was only partly illuminated by the moon—the bottom was still in complete darkness.

Once again Stanley Death experienced the same nervy sensations as before. The dead quiet—the intense heat—the sensation of brooding evil in the air, were all present. But he stuck it, and sat there in stolid silence betraying his nerviness only by the continual smoking of cigarettes which he threw away half-consumed. And all the time the moonlight crept gradually down to the bottom of the pit, until at last it was faintly illuminated by the silver, eerie radiance.

Then they were able to make out that certain things had happened down there. A few yards from the bottom of the path a large circle had been marked out, in boldly painted pentagons, triangles, and other cabalistic symbols. In the centre of the circle, a few feet apart, were two objects that were difficult to make out in the uncertain light.

Doom trained a pair of night-glasses on them, and then whispered

"A heap of earth, and a bowl of water! It looks as though Lin Foo were going to try a little materialisation on his own—as I half expected."

There came a movement from below, and then into the light there stalked a figure that Death would never have suspected to be that of Lin Foo, had he not known. The Chinaman was dressed in gorgeous robes of black silk or satin, with dragons, snakes, pentagons and all sorts of mystic designs worked upon it in gold, that shimmered dully in the faint moonlight. On his head he wore a curiously shaped cap or hat, and in his hands he carried a bowl, which was either of gold or brass. This bowl he set down between the earth and the bowl of water, and then, without a glance upwards, he turned his face to the East, his hands tucked out of sight in his flowing sleeves.

Doom trained his glasses again, then handed them to Stanley without a word. Looking through their powerful lenses, Death could make out that the bowl was nearly full of some dark liquid, from which a faint steam was emanating.

"What the devil is that?" he asked, as he handed the glasses back. Doom replied in one single word:

"Blood!"

Stanley was startled.

"Good God!" he gasped, "Not . . . !"

Doom shook his head:

"Not human, no—that is not necessary. I heard a farmer complaining that he had lost a young sheep last night, though!"

They lapsed into silence again. Below, Lin Foo stood absolutely motionless—and again Death got the notion that he was much taller than he had ever seemed before. He tried to tell himself that it was the effect of the robes!

The minutes passed. The silence seemed to grow more and more intense—more and more pregnant with something that Death could not analyse. A feeling of terrific tension—of waiting for somthing terrific to happen, gripped Stanley. It was rather like the feeling some people have just before the breaking of a bad thunderstorm—and, as though to intensify it, there did suddenly occur a brilliant flash of lightning, from what seemed to be a perfectly clear sky.

As though that had been a signal the motionless figure below stirred. Lin Foo slowly raised his arms until they were spread out like the branches of a "Y". And then, curiously enough Death noticed something that had, for some reason, hitherto escaped him. The little finger on Lin Foo's left hand was missing.

And now the silence was broken by the voice of Lin Foo, raised in a sort of chant. A thin, eerie, monotonous note, that yet had a curious, thin sweetness about it. Doom clutched his companion's arm, and pointed—and Stanley saw that a faint, ruddy glow was coming from the cave that housed the Thing!

"It's coming . . . !" Doom whispered.

They could feel the heat increasing and the sweat commenced to start out on their bodies. Lin Foo's chant grew louder, and now there was a commanding note in it—as though he were summoning someone—or some Thing—to obey his call. . . .

From somewhere in the distance they heard a clock chime twelve. . . .

The heat increased. The glow below grew stronger and ruddier. But then came a change. Quite suddenly the air seemed to stir, though not with a wind, and they both felt it grow cold and damp—so damp that drops of moisture gathered on the vizors of their mica masks. And to their nostrils there came a smell—a harsh, raw smell—the smell of *earth* . . . !

Unable to speak, Doom gripped the other's arm, and pointed to Lin Foo. The light was queer and uncertain, and Stanley Death always felt afterwards that he might have been mistaken, but it seemed to him that on either side of the magician shadows were collecting, as though from the air, and that they were gradually forming two figures—two gigantic figures, one of which was black, and the other a sort of opaque white, and which stood one on either side of Lin Foo, whose chant grew louder and louder. The shadow figures towered on either side of him, and Doom, peering through his glasses, saw what he had expected—that the contents of that bowl of blood were shrinking as though being sucked up by some invisible lips. He noted, too, that the dark figure stood by the heap of earth, the light one by the bowl of water. Then speech came back to him, and he whispered to Stanley:

"My God, man—there are Forces abroad to-night that could shatter the world, if they willed to!"

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f they willed to!"

And Death whispered back, on a note that was like the complaining of a petulant child:

"Hell! But what is it all about—what does it all *mean* . . .?"

"Do you remember I told you once that Elementals can be materialised and used for their own ends by certain powerful magicians? Well, Lin Foo is such a magician, and he is summoning an Earth and a Water Elemental to destroy this flaming horror—about the only powers that can do it! Now watch—you are privileged to see something that human eyes have seldom seen before, or will again . . . !"

The glow coming from the hole in the pit-side was increasing—the shadows that guarded Lin Foo were thickening and taking more definite form; from the skies above the lightning continually flickered, like a hungry, fiery tongue, and dark clouds were rapidly gathering; the air seemed to alternate in waves of intense heat and damp cold; the raw smell of earth grew stronger. And the chant of Lin Foo swelled up on an increasingly high note, while the two men crouched on the edge of the crater and stared down with fascinated eyes.

Out of the hole, like some obscene fiery crustacean, the Thing came crawling. Then it reared itself up, and they could clearly see the twisted, stunted legs, the grotesquely shapeless body, the over-long arms, and the small, globular head, with the pointed ears and those horrible yellow, sightless-looking eyes.

Then, for the first time, It seemed to sense something wrong. It shrank back a little, towards the mouth of It's den—then seemed to recover Itself. Ah, It was angry, now . . . ! A loud crackling sound, such as flames make, came from it and sparks played around head and ears. It approached the circle, but reeled back from it as from violent contact with a solid wall.

The crackling grew louder. Then it crouched, and, with incredible force and swiftness, leapt at the circle. There was nothing visible above the chalked signs on the rocky ground, but as the Thing, in It's leap through the air, came level with those signs, the watchers distinctly heard a great thud, as though It's enormous body had hit some solid object, and It fell back in a struggling heap on the ground.

The crackling sound increased, and little tongues of flame flickered from it as it lay there, struggling and threshing the air with It's legs and arms. It commenced to get onto It's feet—and then a big, black cloud slid silently across the moon, and the light went . . . !

But down in the black depths of the pit the glowing figure of the Fire Elemental gave out a faint light that vaguely illumined the figure of Lin Foo, and the gigantic Shadows that guarded it on either side. Again it seemed to Stanley that the form of Lin Foo was increasing in stature, and growing inhumanly larger and larger. His weird chant rose higher on an insistently monotonous note that was almost an agony to hear. Vaguely they saw the paler Shadow move towards the edge of the circle—nearer to the Thing. And instantly there came a great hissing and a cloud of steam or fog, that dulled the red-hot glow of the Thing so that they could no longer see the other figures. The darkness was so black that it pressed around them like a blanket—blinding, muffling, suffocating . . . ! Abruptly the chant of Lin Foo ceased and the silence that gripped them was

like the silence of the grave—or of Hell . . . !

The only thing that was visible was the reduced glow of the Flaming Horror down there in the pit, and that was moving jerkily, wildly, erratically—as though It was struggling with something. Then It commenced to move, in a straight line and swiftly—towards the spot where the path ran down into the pit. Death thought: "My God, It's coming . . !" and wrenched himself out of a sort of paralysis to prepare for the attack.

Then, a great flash of lightning split the sky, and in its prolonged glare the two watchers got a glimpse of the scene below. The fiery Thing scuttling in It's horrible, crab-like fashion, towards the path—Lin Foo

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with his arms raised almost straight above his head, and his head thrown back so that his face showed like a white patch in the glare. . . . The lightning was cut off, and in the ensuing blackness the voice of Lin Foo, loud and terrible, rang out in what sounded like a command. The Thing was on the path, now, and ascending. . . .

As though in answer to the magician, the whole air seemed, for an instant, to be full of voices—shrill and shrieking, deep and roaring. Then came a terrific crash of thunder, and another flash of lightning which showed them the whole further side of the pit splitting, from top to bottom, and a colossal mass of water, black as the night itself but with huge flecks of white foam topping it, which came roaring and rushing, gurgling and splashing, into the pit. With it came an earth-shock that rocked the ground, and almost flung the two men from their feet—but not quite. . . .

Great, black waves leapt up the sides of the pit almost to the edge, and masses of spray burst over them. Then they saw the huge, burning Thing picked up and tossed about by the waters, as though it had been a toy, and there came a hissing and spluterring that was almost deafening. They saw It, for an instant, struggling madly with the flood—threshing wildly with It's long arms, It's ruddy glow still faintly illuminating the foaming waters, which, in their anger, seemed almost as though they were alive. . . . And then they got one shuddering glimpse of those flaming, yellow, sightless eyes, glaring up at them through the veiling water, as It sank slowly, It's struggles growing less and less, and the red-hot glow of It gradually fading, down, down into the depths. . . .

Then, as the lightning flashed and flickered again, they saw that the mass of water was literally boiling, and sending up great clouds of scalding steam which sent them reeling back from the edge. . . .

"My God!" Death's voice sounded in a scream. "That poor devil Lin Foo—boiled alive . . . !"

And then the rain came—came in a solid mass like the outpouring of some colossal bucket up there in the skies, beating them to their knees and finally flinging them, flat and gasping, prostrate to the ground.

In a few seconds it passed. There came a great sweep of wind, cool and sweet-smelling, and then the young moon came out again, gentle and serene, and once more mistress of the skies.

The two men struggled to their feet, and moved back to the pit-edge. It was half-filled with black water, quiet now, but with steam still rising from it. On the further side they could see that the ground between the pit and the flooded valley showed a great rift, through which the water flowed, gently now, to the slightly lower level of that in the pit itself. It was as though some giant hand had cleft the earth asunder . . . !

"It is over!" said Doom, solemnly, in a hoarse, croaking voice, that seemed to come from a long distance. "And all is well—thanks to Lin Foo! He alone knew the only way to deal with it—and he has done so. We can go and sleep!"

Weakly, like men just arisen from a long illness, they staggered rather than walked back to the car. . . .

The papers devoted a few columns to an account of the strange cloud-

burst and earthquake that had visited the South of England, and even published photographs of the flooded pit, and the curious rift in the earth between it and the litle valley. But it was soon forgotten in the press of War news.

One morning, a few days after their terrific experience, Doom called at Scotland Yard. Stanley Death had not yet recovered from his amazement, and was still a trifle dazed by it.

"I'm just going down to the Bethlehem Hospital, to carry out Lin Foo's last request," Doom informed him, when he was shown into his office. "I thought you'd like to come too—you might find it rather interesting!"

Death sighed heavily:

"I'll come, he agreed. "But I'm a bit chary of going to a place like Bedlam. After what I've seen—or *think* I've seen—in the last few days, I feel they might want to keep me there!"

The Medical Superintendant was greatly interested when he heard the purpose of Doom's visit. Yes, they had such a young man there. He had been found wandering in the streets, apparently suffering from loss of memory—did not know who he was, or where he came from—about twelve months previously, and eventually, at the instigation and charge of a Chinese charitable organisation, had found his way to Bethlehem Hospital.

"He is entirely docile and harmless," the Superintendant explained, "and if you, as a qualified medical man, wish to take him in your charge and are prepared to make yourself responsible for him, I am sure it can be arranged. It will, of course, take a little time. In the meanwhile, perhaps you would like to see the young man?"

Doom said he would, and the Superintendant gave the necessary instructions through the house-phone. Then Doom said:

"By the way, what is his name?"

"Curiously enough," the Superintendant answered, "we have only just discovered that. He has never had any notion of it, and, for some reason has always been called 'Archie." But the other night—the night of the thunderstorm, you know—he seems to have had a sort of seizure, and the first thing he said when he came to was that his name was Lin Foo . . .! I beg your pardon? Did you say something?"

This to Death, who had made some sort of exclamation, and who now said, rather hastily, that it was nothing—he had just thought of something, that was all. Doom smiled, quietly, to himself!

Then the young man was brought in, and Stanley stared at him hard. But one Chinaman looks much like another, to the uninitiated.

Only the young man turned immediately to Doom, and said, calmly

"Greetings, O Master! I have been expecting you would come!"

And the voice was certainly the voice of Lin Foo!

Rather feverishly, Stanley assured himself that the voice of one Celestial was very much like that of another—but then he noticed that the left hand of this young man, who called himself Lin Foo, who looked like a young edition of Lin Foo, and who spoke like Lin Foo, had the little finger missing . . .!

For the rest of that interview, during which arrangements were put in train for the early release of the young man, Stanley Death neither

looked nor behaved like the tough, wide-awake sleuth he undoubtedly was, and when they found themselves back in the car, and once more out on the open road he heaved a big, big sigh, and said:

"Gosh! But I guess I'm real glad to be clear of that place! I don't feel, somehow, that I just fit in with the interior arrangements of a looney-bin, these days. Or perhaps I *do* fit in—a bit too well . . .!"

Doom smiled, dreamily:

"I thought it might shake you, a trifle! But you must remember, Stanley, that there are more things in Heaven and earth than can be properly recorded at Scotland Yard! And also that the Chinese believe in re-incarnation . . .!"

Stanley groaned:

"And, talking of records, what's getting me all het up is—how the tarnation hell am I going to make my report to the Commissioner about this darned affair?"

"That, thank God," said Doom, with due reverence, "is entirely your pigeon!"

THE END

A WITCH'S CHARM AGAINST WITCHCRAFT

The following " charme " was taken down verbatim as it was given by the alleged Lancashire witch Ann Wittle, alias Chattox, known as " Old Chattox " on the occasion of her trial on Monday, August 17th, 1612. She gave it as testimony that as a witch she had at times done good, and having been sent for by the wife of one John Moore to help drink that was forespoken or bewitched, she made use of this " charme " to undo the spell cast by another, and more malevolent witch:

" Three biters hast thou bitten,
Ill Hart, ill Eye, ill Tonge,
Three bitter shall be thy Boote,
Father, Son and Holy Ghost
a God's name.

Five Pater-nosters, five Avies, and a Creede,
In worship of five wounds of our Lord."

(Old Chattox was convicted and sentenced, but was afterwards pardoned by the special intervention of the King.)

The Village in the Mist

by BASIL HERBERT

THEY say I am mad, for that reason, they have shut me away in an asylum—or a "mental hospital" as they insist on calling it. As a matter of fact it is neither—there is no hospitality for insanity here, and certainly there is not, in the true sense of the word, an "asylum" about it!

However, that is beside the point.

They have shut me up here, not, it seems, because I have had an experience which no other living man has ever had, but simply because I insisted on talking about it. Nothing mad about that—any man who had been through what I have been through *would* have talked about it—and, besides, there is a duty one owes to others.

However, you shall judge for yourselves.

I am not, in the ordinary sense of the word, a fool. I am a man of forty-eight, well experienced in the ways of the world, and normally intelligent. Also I follow a business which is apt to make a man deliberate, nerve-steady, and quick in action. I am a professional parachutist. Once, at the beginning of my career, I used to drop from balloons—to-day, of course, I descend from air-planes.

On a certain day, not very long ago, I was engaged to make a descent at a charity-féte given by a lady of title. As the grounds were not big enough, or clear enough, for a plane to go up from them, so it was arranged the plane should take-off from Croydon Aerodrome, and fly over the grounds, into which I should in due course, descend. In order to make the thing as certain as possible, I arranged to make a trial descent very early on the morning of the day in question.

I had made arrangements to make my trial descent at about 6.30 a.m., the plane to take off from the Croydon Aerodrome at about 6 o'clock. Not relishing such a very early start as would be necessary from my home in Brighton, I decided to travel up to Croydon the previous evening, and spend the night there. As it happened, an old friend of mine, whom I had not seen for a long time, turned up on this particular day, and, as a result of talking to him, I did not leave Brighton until a little after eleven at night. I remember it was just eleven-five as I drove through Preston village in my car—an open (thank God) Morris tourer.

It was a glorious night in June, with a million stars twinkling in a cloudless sky, like golden jewels in a mantle of blue velvet. I did not hurry, but drove at a good average speed. I glanced at my watch as I approached Merstham, and noticed that it was within a few minutes of midnight.

I accelerated a little. That particular part of the world contained unpleasant memories for me, for not so

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very long before I had run down and killed a motor-cyclist there. It had been his own fault, but it had been a beastly business, and had got on my nerves somewhat. I do not like killing people, even with my car!

It was just beyond the actual spot where this had happened that I came to the fork in the road. It did not strike me, then, for I was thinking about the accident, but there should not have been a fork there at all. I have traversed that road some hundreds of times, and knew quite well that there is no fork there. As it was, I just took the left, and wider, road automatically.

It was an unusually wide road, well metalled and with a low, even hedge on either side. There were no houses on it at all.

As a matter of fact I was just coming back to earth, and realising that the road was strange to me, when it suddenly narrowed. The hedges seemed to come in at me, until I was running along a narrow lane—so narrow that there was not room for another vehicle to pass me.

It had just struck me that I had, in some mysterious manner, missed my way, when I ran into the mist. I call it a mist, for want of a better term, but, actually, it was neither mist nor fog. In colour it might have been the latter, for it was a sort of dull grey (not white, like a field-mist in summer but it had none of the smell of fog about it. Nevertheless, it was very dense, and deadened all sound in a most peculiar manner—even the noise of my own car engine seemed strangely distant and muffled in it. I realised that I should have to turn back, but I could not do that in the narrow gut of the road, or lane, I tried it, but there was definitely no room. To make it more difficult the road had dropped into a cutting, and there were now steep banks on either side. Plainly, the only thing to do was to push ahead, until I found room to turn in—or, perhaps, it might be possible to find a way back to the main road without turning. Anyway, the road was so excellently made up and kept that it was evident it must lead to *somewhere*!

So I proceeded to push forward, very slowly because of the mist, which was so dense that I could not see a yard ahead, even with all my lights on.

I am not—or was not then—a nervous man, yet that blind progress through the mist was distinctly nerve-racking to me. Apart from the fear of something running head-on into me. On that single-track road, the mist itself was very trying. I would not then have admitted that it frightened me, but the fact was that it did. It seemed, somehow, to be isolating me—cutting me off from my fellow creatures. It struck me, for some reason, that being dead must be very much the same—a sort of feeling one's way through a mist, in complete loneliness and isolation, towards the new and unknown World. The utter silence increased this suggestion. The way that mist shrouded everything, and shut out sound as well as sight was nothing short of uncanny! The screech of my horn, which I sounded continually, was flung back at me as though from stone walls!

I don't know how long I pushed my way, at funeral speed, through that grey shroud, I cannot say. It seemed hours. The mist seemed to increase in density, too, and my personal discomfort increased with it. I was becoming definitely scared, when, to my intense relief, I saw that

the visibility was improving!

The mist grew thinner. I could now see the sides of the road, and observed that they were further apart. The road was widening again. Another hundred yards or so and I had room to turn, but a glance back at that dense grey wall behind me decided me to keep on. I wouldn't have gone back through that mist for a hundred pounds!

Presently I saw houses ahead—dim, grey shapes through the mist. I accelerated a little, and found myself in a street, with houses on either side. They were queer houses, though! I could not see what they were made of—some kind of stone apparently—but they were of a curious grey colour, almost the colour of the mist itself. Also they were all of exactly the same shape, dead square, with flat roofs, and with four windows and a door to each of them. They were exactly even distances apart, and there was not a light to be seen in any one of them—the latter fact, of course, not being surprising since it was now well after midnight.

All the same there was something weird, uncanny and *unreal* about that street. Not a living thing was stirring—not even a dog or a cat, let alone the policeman whose blue-clad, leisurely figure I should have welcomed with delight for once!

Then another curious thing struck me. Although the road was very wide, and magnificently made—quite the best road I had yet seen in England, there were no pavements, and no lamp-posts. The front doors of those strange houses opened right slap onto the road itself!

There seemed to be something wrong about the whole place! The dead silence of it was enough to frighten anybody, without anything else. I have known the silence of the plains, the deserts and the sea—but never experienced anything like that.

With a desperate effort I threw off a feeling of scare, and, although the mist was still dense enough to prevent me seeing more than a hundred yards or so ahead, I accelerated.

Presently the road curved, for the first time, and then I found myself driving into a big, open space, where four roads converged. I could see that—and I could also see that all the other roads were exactly like the one I had just traversed. Houses and all were precisely the same.

Right in the centre of the square in which I now found myself, on a sort of island, stood a solitary building. In shape and colour it was exactly like the other houses in this strange place, but I observed a signpost and sign outside it. Plainly, then, it was an inn, and, with a sense of relief, I decided to knock up the landlord and ask where on earth I'd got to. And then, even as this thought crossed my mind, I saw that it would not be necessary to knock them up, for behind every one of the closely shrouded windows a light sprang up—the first lights I had seen since I entered the village, or whatever it was. It was as though they had been expecting me!

I drove up to the door and, as I alighted from the car, I looked up at the sign on the post. It was blank. For some reason, this startled me for the moment. Then I realised that they were probably having it re-painted.

I turned to the door, and saw that it was standing ajar, showing a glimpse of a lighted room within. Without hesitation I pushed it further open, and walked in.

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found myself. The walls, quite bare and without ornament, were presumably distempered in that same dull, grey colour which distinguished the whole place. The furniture consisted of a plain deal form, two or three equally plain wooden chairs, and a square, wooden table. At one end there was a door, showing beyond it a flight of steep carpetless stairs; at the other a counter, but with nothing on it at all. The shelves of bottles and things, usually associated with an inn, were also missing, and there was not a mirror or an advertisement to be seen.

Truly, a strange place!

But stranger than the room was the single individual who occupied it, sitting behind the counter. I say he was strange, but, when I come to it, it is difficult to describe in just what *way* he was strange. He startled me when I first saw him sitting there, but he startled me still more when he raised his head and looked at me. I have never, in my life, seen anything so utterly expressionless as was his face—not even in a statue! Also it was colourless—there was no sort of colour about him at all. The skin was a dull, grey monetone, and, furthermore, it was drawn so tightly that every bone, almost every tooth, was clearly defined beneath it. The lips were narrow, and quite bloodless; the eyes deep set and entirely without colour or expression—horribly like those of a dead fish! The hair, too, was entirely colourless—neither dark nor fair—long, lank and completely dead in appearance. He was dressed, neither well nor badly, in a suit of grey flannel, which looked, somehow, curiously like a uniform.

He sat there, regarding me steadily, but entirely without expression. He appeared to be neither glad nor sorry, surprised or disappointed, to see me. For a moment I had a horrible feeling that he was not a man at all, but just some peculiarly beastly mechanical figure!

To prove this, I spoke to him—not altogether steadily, for my nerves were becoming shaken.

"Good evening!" I said. "Can you tell me, please, what village is this "

He continued to regard me, for a moment, in the same utterly expressionless manner, and when at last he replied, his tone was just as expressionless as his features:

"We call it the Village-in-the-Mist!" he said.

"The deuce you do! Well, what do other people call it " I spoke sharply —mainly, I think, because the fellow frightened me!

He shook his head:

"I don't know!"

I decided not to ask any more questions, my one desire was to get away from this place as quickly as possible.

"I've got a car outside," I explained, "and I seem to have lost my way. Can you tell me the nearest route to Croydon?"

Once more he shook his head:

"You won't get there to-night. You'll never get through the mist!"

I cannot hope to describe to you the utter tonelessness of the man's voice. It was like the voice of one who is hypnotised, or in a trance. He was looking at me all the time he was speaking, but I had a horrible idea that he could not really see me. His eyes were like those of a blind man. Then it struck me that he might actually *be* blind, and I drew some strange sort of comfort from that.

"Why?" I asked. "Is the mist all round the place, then?"

And then . . . he took my hand.

ook my hand.

He nodded.

"Yes!" he answered. "It always is —at night-tme. You'll have to stop here the night!"

I was tired enough, but the notion of stopping in that strangely sinister place did not appeal to me at all. Yet —it was better than facing that uncanny mist again! After all, I could easily get to Croydon in time for my start, once the daylight came. And I suddenly had a longing for daylight such as I have never experienced before or since.

"You can put me up, then?" I asked the strange landlord—and the shakiness of my tone annoyed me.

"There is no garage!" he said. "It will be alright where it is. No one will touch it!"

"Very well!" I agreed, trying desperately to assume a confident, even a dictatorial tone. "I shall hold you responsible for it! I'll just bring my things in."

He did not answer, but continued to regard me in that blank, *unseeing* manner. I wondered again if he really was blind.

I went outside and got my bags. One contained my pyjamas and shaving tackle, the other my air-suit and parachute. I opened one of the bags and slipped in an electric torch and a heavy spanner. I did not by any means trust my sinister host, and if he tried any funny games . . .!

I noted, as I re-entered, that his eyes met me, and followed me as I walked across towards the stairs. In order to do this he turned his head, with a strangely mechanical motion. He was certainly not blind, then—but I still had a strange notion that he was not *alive* at all, but was merely an automaton!

I decided that I would not come down again!

I paused at the bottom of the staris.

"Call me not later than five!" I ordered, curtly. "I have to be in Croydon by six-thirty. Good-night!"

"Good-nght!" was the entirely toneless reply.

The bedroom on top of the stairs was no more inviting, and scarcely less strange than the room below. Again the walls were quite without ornament, and were of that same dull, grey colour. I examined them, later, and found that they were made of some sort of stone, which was unfamiliar to me.

The furniture consisted of a bed only—and this, for some reason, bore such a resemblance to a death-bed that I almost expected to find a corpse hidden in it. I decided I could not possibly sleep in that. The light, as in the case of the room downstairs, came from an opaque globe, let into the ceiling. There was no sort of switch visible, which struck me as peculiar. I was glad I had brought my electric torch with me!

I closed the door, which had no lock, and, having pulled up the blind —which was of coarse grey canvas— I put my bag down by the window, and sat down on it, prepared to pass the night in such comfort as was possible!

For some time I waited for some sound of my strange host retiring, but I heard nothing. It was then that the deathly silence of the place struck me fully for the first time. There was literally not a sound to be heard—not the bark of a dog, the mew of a cat or the crowing of a cock. For even the sound of a mouse scratching I would, at that time, have given untold gold —but there was nothing! The silence that brooded over that place was like the silence of the grave itself.

And then I became conscious of the

smell. I realised that that smell had been in my nostrils since I first struck the mist—but that it had increased considerably since I had been in the village. It was a queer, close smell which was vaguely familiar to me, but for a long time I could not place it. When I did, at last, I sprang to my feet as though galvanised, and a cold, clammy sweat broke out on my forehead. *It was the smell of corpses —dead bodies . . .!*

Could it be possible that there was a corpse somewhere in that cursed inn, and the smell permeating the place . . .?

I suddenly felt I could not stop in that room a single moment longer. I opened the door and walked down the stairs without troubling to silence my footsteps. Downstairs the light was still on, but the "bar" was empty. The sinister landlord had disappeared—and I heaved a sigh of relief for that!

I walked outside, into the brooding silence (the door was still ajar).

My car was still there, and untouched. The mist, curiously enough, for there was not a breath of air, hung around in queer little spirals, and in the distance I could see it like a thick wall, cutting me off from the outside world. I shuddered—I was afraid of that mist!

Then I started to explore the streets. I went a little distance up and down each of the four of them—there seemed to be no more. Every house was exactly the same—dead-square, flat-roofed, and standing stark and grey—a grey that was only a little deeper than the shrouding mist. It struck me that they looked horribly like tombstones!

Nowhere was there a sign or sound of life of any sort—and a sudden fancy seized me that the places were all empty. On the impulse of the moment I tried one of the doors. It was fastened, so I gave a thundering knock on it. At least, under ordinary conditions it would have been a thundering knock, but as it was it came back on me like an echo. It was as though no sound would penetrate that accursed mist! Then from inside there came a noise, as of some heavy thing being dragged along the floor, and then a low sound which I can only describe as a chuckle, and which yet was so utterly unnatural, so inhuman, that I was seized with a sudden panic-fear, and fled as for my life. I did not stop until I was once again in my room, for I had a fear of something (I knew not what) that might come at me from behind!

Back in my room, calmer, and thinking things over, another curious thing struck me. Not only had that strange village no animal life and no policeman or lamp-posts, but it had also no shops, no pillar-boxes and, apparently, no gutters or drains! In Heaven's name, then, what sort of people were they who lived there . . .?

I must have dozed off then, for I awoke with a start to find, to my intense relief, that it was daylight. If you could call it daylight! A thin, grey light, sunless and airless. It struck me that it was just dawn, and that there were no birds singing—then I looked at my watch and found it was five minutes after six! And I had to be at the aerodrome before six-thirty!

To save time I hastily undid my bag and put on my air-suit, strapping the parachute to my back, so that I was all ready to go up. Then I clattered down the stairs, slung my bags into the car, and called for the landlord. There was no answer, so I went back and put a pound note on

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the counter—quite enough pay for such a cursed night's lodging!

When I came out again I saw that my noise had, apparently, aroused the whole of the population of this strange place. They were coming out of their houses—one to each house—and hurrying towards me, with curiously gliding steps which were quite noiseless except for a soft pad-padding such as animals make. I

It was the smell of corpses—dead bodies!

started up my engine, I stared aghast in horror at them. Except for differences in features and stature, they were all exactly the same as that landlord fellow! They all had the lank, dead hair, the dull, fish-like eyes, and the colourless, tight-drawn skin. And they all wore the same loose suits of grey stuff—evidently, as I had imagined, a sort of uniform.

Through the whirling spirals of mist these creatures came padding, and gathered around me, not speaking a word but just staring at (or through) me with those seemingly sightless eyes.

And then, pushing his way through the crowd, came one I had seen before. I stared at the face I knew (and, God knows, had reason to) and, instinctively I put out my hand, as one does on seeing an acquaintance.

"Why, it's James Mason!" I cried—and even as I did so I remembered that James Mason was the man I had run down in the car and killed! I added, hastily: "Then you're *not* . . .!"

He did not speak, but he—smiled. That is to say the tightly drawn skin drew tighter about the mouth, and the lips curled upwards to show the dull, discoloured teeth. . . . And then . . . he took my hand!

God! The hand I gripped . . .! There was no mistaking it—it was stiff, cold and . . . *dead* . . .! I was shaking hands with a corpse! And suddenly it came to me ,the ghastly truth! *All those Things were dead—every one of them* . . .!

With a yell of fear and unutterable horror, I pushed the Thing away from me and took a blind leap into the car, trod on the accelerator, and shot straight at, and through, the crowd—and, as I went, there came after me a wild howl of rasping laughter—like the laughter of lost souls on the brink of Hell!

Mad with fear, I sent the car tearing down that road at something over sixty to the hour. Like a grey wall the mist confronted me, and I shot, heedlessly, straight into it—and into Nothingness . . .!

Down—down—down—the car and I! With the wind roaring madly in my ears, and the demons of fear still clutching at my heart . . .!

But remember, falling is my business! More by instinct than anything

else, I got myself clear of the car, and saw it (being far heavier' go whirling past me as I dropped. Then, clear of it's danger, I pulled the string of my parachute . . . !

The headlong fall was checked, and after descending gently for about five hundred feet, I landed safely in a field—within a few yards of the Merstham Road!

The first thing I did was to look up—there was nothing to be seen above, save a cloud, of a curiously square shape, just sailing across the moon. And then I realised that it was still night! I looked at my watch and saw it was—*just five minutes after twelve*!

I got my parachute folded and stowed away, and walked to the road —and there I found my car, smashed to smithereens, on the side of the road and, as near as I could judge, just about the spot where I had taken the road into the mist!

After I had made my parachute descent the same day, I made some careful inquiries, and elicited these startling facts:

In February, Alfred Myatt, of Clapham, was found dead beside his smashed car on a lonely road in Northumberland.

Early in March, Thomas Foley, of Grosvener Place, W., was found dead in the wreckage of his car just off the road, not far from Elstree, Hants.

Later in the same month Felix Jay, of Manchester, was found dead a few yards away from his car in the centre of Salisbury Plain—a long distance from any road.

In each of these cases both car and body were smashed almost beyond recognition, and in no case was there any wheel-tracks to be seen, nor any sign of a collision. But there was every appearance that they had fallen from a great height! Furthermore, each of these men had, at some time, run down and killed a pedestrian *wthin a mile or so of the place where their bodies were eventually found*!

After that, what could I do? I did all I could—and nicely they have thanked me for it!

I went to the polce and the R.A.C. —and none of them would believe me. Anxious to save further loss of life, I persisted—until they decided that I was mad, and shut me up here.

Mad! The dolts! Just because I believe what I have just written, and because, naturally enough, I cannot bear the dark, and scream at the sight of anything grey, they say I am *mad*!

Mad, indeed? Isn't the above statement perfectly clear, consise and lucid? Is there any sign of wildness in the writing of it? The fools—the idiots—it is they who are mad, not I . . . !

But there, I must not allow myself to get excited, or I shall never get out of this place. They have told me that several times!

THE END

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The Chained Terror

by HENRY RETLAW

MOLLY'S gay little face puckered into a pitying smile as she saw the rooks flap lazily overhead and alight in the maize field.

She knew my gun would take heavy toll of them later, and stubbornly as she tried to force herself to become a good sportswoman, her kindly heart went out in remorse as I relentlessly thinned them out day by day.

"Oh . . . those poor birds," she exclaimed, "It seems such a shame that they have to be killed."

"Shame it may be," I replied. "But the damage they do to our crops plays Old Harry with our profits, so killed they must be."

I grinned as I pulled up my old mare outside my neighbours farm, remembering my lovely wife's habit of missing nearly everything she shot at, when I suddenly paused as I was alighting from the cart, a queer premonition of pending calamity in my heart.

The weird old farm house had always had a depressing effect on me, but to-day I could sense something evil in the very air about the place. So strong was the feeling that I was stung by an almost irresistible urge to get back into the cart and drive on. So, of course, I did the exact opposite . . . and got out.

The house was a bleak looking squarely-built building, huge concrete blocks irregularly spaced out forming the walls, with a roof hanging lopsidedly over the forbidding looking porch of rough hewn timber. Even in the warm sun of that beautiful August afternoon the place looked ugly and forlorn, and as I approached the ramshackle door I felt again that spasm of nameless dread and horror reaching to my very soul. Again I felt the urge to turn about and run from the horrible place, and yet again I fought down the stark fear within me and reached up to rap the huge knocker . . . as I did so the reverbrations sounded like a clap of thunder in my ears and I jumped involuntarily in sheer terror.

For a seemingly endless period there was no answer and I was about to knock again when I heard a shuffling footstep approaching the door from upstairs, and a creaking squeal as rusty bolts were withdrawn and the heavy door was slowly dragged open.

The sight of my neighbours homely face dispelled for a brief moment the fear pervading me and I breathed freely in relief as I grasped his huge hand in greeting.

Homely in appearance he certainly was, but in my frame of mind his huge slowly rolling head, and massive shoulders with low hung arms, and peculiar deformed legs took on a new significance. I had known him for perhaps a little over a year and our transactions had always been rapidly attended to. "Come inside,"

he said. "And bring your wife in, too." This as he noticed her standing quietly by the old mare's head. A pretty picture she made as she stood there, the sun glinting on her shining gold hair, trim figure shown to rare advantage by her snug fitting riding breeches and white silk blouse. She walked up to the door with the free swinging stride I had grown to love, shook hands with the ungainly farmer and passed in with me to the interior of the old farm house. "Well, Garson," I said. "I've called in to settle up for last month's supplies." He slowly turned his shaggy great head towards me and I caught a glimpse of his eyes as he momentarily looked at Molly, and what I read into his glance brought that nameless fear back into my heart.

"That can wait for a bit," he said. "Come on into the kitchen for a minute!"

I beckoned to Molly and we followed him into the huge rambling room he called the kitchen. Humping himself into a massive rocking chair by the old fire place he gestured to us to seat ourselves on a rough bench up against the opposite wall.

We had scarcely settled down when he lumberingly got up out of his chair, leaned over almost casually and like lightning his huge hairy fist thudded against my jaw.

A bomb burst in my brain. Everything flooded out in an avalanche of rushing black. How long I was out I never knew. Eventually I groaned and opened my eyes. For a moment I lay throbbing to the agony of my aching head before I was aware that I lay trussed hand and foot, on a dirty floor.

Slowly my head cleared and I painfully turned my head to see if Molly was near. I was filled with blind rage when I saw no trace of her. . . . I heard myself snarling noises that weren't human words. I lunged at the ropes. I fought them till my arms were slimed with blood that ran from the lacerated flesh. Perspiration bathed me from head to foot, and I felt my stomach turning over sickeningly as I writhed and twisted to get clear of the strong ropes that bound me. All to no avail as the great brute had done his job only too well.

Realising the utter futility of my struggles, I slowly mastered my blind rage and set myself to think out why my apparently harmless neighbour had calmly knocked me out and left me so thoroughly trussed up on the dank cellar floor. Light coming from a small crack in the rotting shutters of the window, high up in the stone wall, revealed overhead grey beams festooned with cobwebs. Could I only get free of the maddening ropes there would be little or no difficulty in crashing open the shutters to freedom and the chance to discover what had happened to Molly.

Suddenly I stiffened from head to foot as I heard a queer snuffling whine at the door of the cellar, a harsh croaking sound like that of a huge frog, then a scratching and thumping as some enormous weight lunged against the door. More snuffling and whining and a dragging pad pad of some animal-like creature's movements making away.

As the sounds receded farther and farther from the door I breathed easily again, and set myself to wait on events. No need to exhaust my strength in futile efforts to loose my bonds. A little later I drifted off into troubled sleep, and awoke with a jerk as I heard movements at the door of the cellar, the creaking of the old lock as it was turned, and the slow

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Framed in the entrance was the looming figure of Garson, lolling head bent down until his great craggy chin reached his enormous chest. I still could not bring myself to understand his reasons for laying me out so unconcernedly, and it looked as if my surmising might soon be ended for he walked over to me in the crab-like gait I knew so well, yet had not feared.

Bending over me he surprisingly loosed the ropes and hauled me effortlessly to my feet with one powerful heave of his great hands, and still silent, and holding me powerless in the grasp of his mighty hands, propelled me out through the door and up the slimy stone steps to the comparative light of the kitchen.

Stiff and sore after lying for many hours trussed like a fowl I could offer no resistance. He dumped me down on the old bench and I slid helplessly to the floor, the intense agony of the returning circulation of blood to my tortured limbs being almost unbearable.

A sharp rattling as of chains jerked me out of my coma of pain and I looked up to see where the clatter came from, and then I saw the horror. . . .

I sat there speechless, paralysed with revulsion and terror, staring at that goggled eyed thing with an almost human face, with loose slobbering lips; its flattened snout-like nose. After a moment the head wobbled back, until the pallid eyes were fixed on my face with a pale glare that sent chills of horror running up and down my spine.

Again the sharp staccato rattling of chains and the grotesque thing plunged madly towards me, jerked up short by the immensely strong chains that secured it to the stone wall. A gutteral bark of command from Garson and the horror cowered glibbering into the corner, pale eyes blinking with fear. . . .

I saw that it was fastened by massive chains clamped on each of the gnarled legs so that movement was restricted to a few feet from the wall. Bent over almost double I should estimate its height at over seven feet, straightened out to its full height probably nine feet of nameless dread. . . . What it was I had no means as yet of discovering.

Garson yanked me up from the floor with a single powerful jerk, but by this time I had recovered some of my own vast strength and my fist crashed into his heavy face . . . again and again. Times without number, driving him back, battering him, pounding away endlessly, until that rugged homely face was a mess of blood and dirt. The shock of my sudden mad attack took him by utter surprise for a few brief moments, but with a heave of his vast shoulders he barged me crazily over to the corner of the room where the thing was chained up, and an animal snarl sounded close to my ears . . . two huge claw-like hands clamped on my throat and the great cavern of a mouth with fetid breath stinking in my nostrils, teeth gnashing with fury, hovered menacingly . . . when again that gutteral bark of command and the thing released me, half dead with fear and partial strangulation. I dropped limply to the floor and must have passed out, for the next thing I knew was that I was again trussed up and Garson was bending over me waiting for the first signs of returning consciousness. . . . I weakly twisted in the torturing ropes and rolled partially over to face him,

his face still livid from the hammering I had given him.

"What have you done with Molly," I gasped at him. "What have you done with her?"

He slowly turned his massive, battered head towards me, his split lips oozing blood and froth.

"She be alright," he growled, "so far."

Then he waddled clumsily out, and I heard his heavy footsteps clumping through the old farmhouse to the yard, where the sound of a pump working soon indicating he was cleaning up his badly smashed face.

As soon as his back was turned the horror in the corner got up off it's haunches and began shuffling up and down within the limits of its chains, emitting weird whining noises with a strange resemblance to human speech. . . . I listened intently, my heart bounding with fear that the gigantic freak might work itself up into a rage and break free from the stout chains . . . . full exertion of the enormous strength simmering in that grotesque heap of mighty muscle would render the steel chains impotent . . . . the twisted bestial face slowly straightened out in lines of blank questioning wonder when I very quietly started to talk . . . . utter nonsense, but the mere sound of my voice caused the thing to stop it's ceaseless shuffling up and down, while the feeble brain behind the queerly wrinkled forehead tried to wrestle with the problem of a quiet friendly voice. . . . I had exultant hopes of getting some kind of control over the thing when the faint sound of a scream from the yard sent it into paroxyms of violent action.

I tore and wrenched at the ropes, writhing about the floor in impotent frenzy . . . . again that faint wail of sheer terror . . . . then the lumbering steps of Garson approaching the door and a muffled sobbing and moaning . . . . and he rolled through the door with Molly, a helpless pitiful bundle, humped over his shoulder.

With the sight of Molly the thing leapt into action, terrific lunges of the powerful legs wrenching at the chains in ever stronger effort, gibbering face again transformed into something inhuman. Garson dumped Molly on to the floor, his face showing no feeling of any kind, spat out a gruff word and stooped to heave me over his shoulder as he would a sack of grain. I hung limply over his back as he heaved me through the door and passed on into the room beyond the hall, where he slung me heavily on to the floor.

I lay for some time in an agony of fear for Molly's safety and started to work my way slowly over to the old hearth. Inch by inch I wormed along the floor until I backed against the heavy table, rolled helplessly against the stout leg with a jolt. The rattle of cutlery renewed hope in my heart and I plunged myself recklessly against the table time after time until the clatter of falling crockery made music in my ears.

The broken fragments of razor-edged crockery were likely to be my salvation, and I frenziedly worked over on to my back where I could get to work on the ropes on my wrists. A few minutes of searing pain as the jagged edges gashed and lacerated my hands and wrists and I felt one hand almost free, a few more minutes of agonising effort and the ropes slid from my bloodstained hands. I was free. . . .

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Molly lay laxly in the Monster's grip.

monster's chains . . . . then a mumble of the gutteral tones of Garson in the old kitchen. . . . I silently made my way towards the kitchen door, feeling a slow return of strength in my muscular body and the urge to run amuck against Garson and the weird horror he kept in captivity. Without any sort of a weapon my chance was negligible and I looked keenly about me for anything which might serve. An old scythe caught my eye propped up against the dank wall, and the comfortable feel of the thing in my strong hands gave me courage.

Creeping towards the old kitchen I barged clumsily against a pile of loose timber and the din I raised was enough to raise the dead . . . a hoarse shout from the kitchen from Garson, a leap from me to the door, a harsh crash as the door was slammed shut in my face . . . I flung myself bodily at the door, fifteen stones of bone and muscle keyed up to violent action.

How long I raged helplessly in front of that door before I regained some measure of common sense I do not know. But at last I realised the futility of battering my body against the stout panels and catching sight of an old sledge hammer through the open door that led to the yard, I tore madly out after it and lunged back to shower terrific blows at the panels . . . my efforts were quickly rewarded and the top panels splintered into jagged splinters of wood.

The sight that met my eyes I shall never forget . . . Molly lay laxly in the monster's grip . . . his gloating bestial face muzzled over her white neck. I knew then that I must smash my way through that door or it would be soon over, his clawing paws would soon mangle the life out of her. I brought the hammer smashing down on the door with every ounce of strength I possessed and the solid oak panels shook, quivered and finally gave way with a rending crash.

Garson was laying inert on the floor, his face smashed to pulp, his hairy chest and shoulders slimed with blood from the clawing terror's rending grip. With a snarl of animal rage the hulking brute abandoned the beautiful body of my wife and threw himself towards me to the full distance the chains allowed him, wrenching powerfully with his enormous legs at the staple and chains . . . the thing had the strength of an elephant and the staple had to go . . . and it did so with such suddenness that the great hulking shape was catapulted across the kitchen to come up suddenly against the rough stone wall with a tremendous crash that dazed even that vast head . . . I saw my chance and leapt forward, hammer in hand to crash it down on the misshapen skull, the wary brute sensed the danger and thrust out a huge paw-like hand to wrench the hammer from my hand as if I was a child, leaving me weaponless . . . like lightning I leapt for the door out into the rambling passage, snatched up the old scythe, tore back into the room of terror.

What followed was frightful, appalling, like animals we leapt at each other, tearing, biting, gouging, pounding. I, hacking at the thing with the murderous scythe, taking the clawing terror's slashes until my face and chest dripped blood from a score of deep gashes. I saw one of its arms drop off, blood gushing in streams from the severed arteries. As I hacked a shrill piercing scream of pain came from the writhing lips and I swept the scythe around in a wide circle, this time with deadly effect as the keen edge cut through neck and

vertebrae to sever the head almost entirely from the body, the frightful sight of the hanging head on sagging trunk with the blood gushing turned my stomach over in sickening agony. I felt on the verge of passing out from the effects of the loss of blood from my many gaping wounds and leaned against the wall to recover my strength in some measure.

Throughout the terrible events of the last few minutes, Molly had mercifully remained unconscious, and I staggered weakly over to her and gently raised her blonde head on to my knee . . . as I did so she stirred and moaned, slowly the heavy lids of her eyes were raised and the ready

His huge hairy fist thudded against my jaw.

scream which leapt to her lips as recollections flooded back into her mind was stopped by the sight of me gazing down at her . . . she weakly sat up and catching full sight of the havoc wrought by the thing on my battered face and body . . . and then saw the almost headless horror heaped up on the dirt floor, shuddered in utter loathing and buried her head in my breast, recking little of the blood that smothered it in the stress of her emotion and relief.

We slowly rose and, bidding her sit down on the bench, I went over to the silent distorted figure of Garson sprawled out on the floor and turned over the grisly head. As I did so a groan burst from the shapeless lips, and I saw that there was yet an opportunity of discovering the explanation of the mad happenings of the last few hours, so I rushed out into the yard and quickly returned with a pail brimming with water. I scooped copious quantities over his smashed features with but little thought of the probable pain it would give him, and was soon rewarded by the faint mutter of words from the shapeless gash of a mouth. I bent low to hear and the mutter faded and strengthened with irritating cadences of incoherence, but after I had trickled some of the water through the agony clenched teeth the words came with greater clearness.

Halting frequently to recover a little of his fast vanishing strength, Garson disjointedly told the whole strange story, and while we listened, for Molly had joined me when she saw what was happening, we could almost feel a little sorry for him.

The shapeless, shambling, yet gigantic thing which might have been a gorilla, moron or almost a prehistoric monster, was his son by his long dead wife, born a tiny pigmylike gnome, yet rapidly growing physically into an enormously powerful yet frightfully deformed shape, with the mentality of a mad ape. In his broken words Garson told of the queer regard and affection he had for

this thing that was his son, and his lifelong efforts to keep his secret so that his son should not be taken from him and put under rigorous control in a madhouse . . . the delight the thing showed when it caught sight of a woman through the narrow crack of the shutters as she passed in front of the old farmhouse . . . the temptation to pander to that delight when Molly stood outside by the old mare's head . . . the insensate impulse which led him to lay me out in the kitchen . . . the crazy antics of utter delight when he took Molly in to the room where the freak was chained . . . the snatching of Molly from him by the human horror . . . his carelessly stretched out hands to reclaim Molly before harm came to her . . . the sudden howl of rage from his mad son . . . the dropping of Molly to the floor and the murderous attack which had left him almost lifeless . . . the weary voice droned on with it's monotony of pain getting weaker every second until at last it faded, and was suddenly still . . . Garson was dead.

The rest is soon told . . . the police, inquests, explanations, and what was left was the memory of a horror which will stay in our minds while life lasts. . . .

THE END

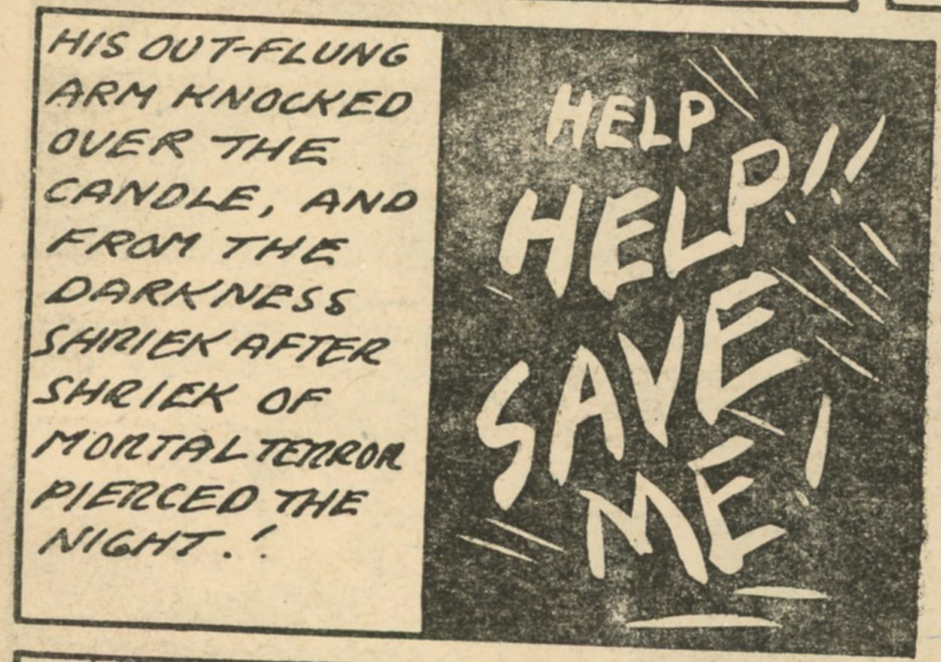
DESCRIPTION OF A WARLOCK

(Taken from on old book on Witchcraft—1589—and altered only in so far as the spelling has been modernised.)

. . . This Warlock was a terrific thing to look upon. For his eyes were great and like discs of fire but having no pupils thereto. His nose was thin and sharp, and covered with warts and the nostrils thereof were scarlet, and from them fire did spurt when he breathed. His mouth was huge, and when opened showed sight of great teeth like unto the yellow fangs of a ravenous beast of prey, only that they were all broken and yellow with age, and from his mouth when it was open worms and serpents did crawl, and fall to the floor about his feet. And the colour of this face was green, and green, too, were his ears which were vast and did flap like the wings of a bat, only slowly. His hair was long and lank and grey, but did rise about his head and writhe and twist as though it were in itself alive. And on his hands, which were each of six fingers, there were great claws, on which the blood of his victims was dried. And the stench of him was as the stench of old graves, so that no man could bear it long and hold his senses. . . .

DENE VERNON
GHOST INVESTIGATOR
THANK HEAVENS THAT LOOKS LIKE A HOUSE!
A TRAVELLER, LOST IN A TERRIFIC STORM ON A NORTHERN MOORLAND, SEES LIGHTS AHEAD AND STRUGGLES ON TO THEM.
I'M SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU, BUT I HAVE LOST MY WAY ACROSS THE MOORS!
I'M AFRAID WE'VE GOT RATHER A HOUSE-FULL, BUT YOU CAN'T GO ON IN A STORM LIKE THIS!
ITS VERY KIND OF YOU!
WHILE THE TRAVELLER IS BEING ENTERTAINED, HIS HOSTS ARE WORRIED.
I DON'T LIKE IT, DICK. BUT WE WILL HAVE TO FIX UP THE OLD HAUNTED CHAMBER FOR HIM!
THIS WAY SIR! SORRY BUT WE'VE ONLY CANDLE-LIGHT IN THIS OLD WING OF THE HOUSE!
THIS IS YOUR ROOM. WE'VE MADE UP A NICE FIRE IN CASE YOU WOULD WISH TO SIT UP AWHILE.
'STRANGE OLD PLACE, IT GIVES ONE A RATHER UNCANNY FEELING. I'D BETTER GET TO BED BEFORE I GET NERVY!
THE ROOM SEEMS FULL OF SHADOWS! I THINK I'LL LEAVE THE CANDLE ALIGHT

THE MAN DRIFTED INTO AN UNEASY SLEEP; SUDDENLY HE AWOKE WITH A CRY OF HORROR, AS A SHADOWY FORM SEEMED TO REACH OUT TO HIM!


HIS OUT-FLUNG ARM KNOCKED OVER THE CANDLE, AND FROM THE DARKNESS SHRIEK AFTER SHRIEK OF MORTAL TERROR PIERCED THE NIGHT.!
HELP
HELP!!
SAVE ME!

HELP
OH
HELP

OPEN THE DOOR!
OPEN THE DOOR!

NO REPLY CAME, AND THE HORRIFIED LISTENER, BURST IN THE DOOR

TOO LATE! A GASP OF HORROR CAME AS THEY GAZED ON THE TERROR-DISTORTED FEATURES OF THE DEAD TRAVELLER!

THIS IS TERRIBLE, THERE'S ONLY ONE MAN I KNOW WHO WOULD SOLVE THIS. I WILL WRITE TOMORROW

NEXT MO
URGENT
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TO DENE
VERNON.

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IS TERRIBLE,
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NE THIS. I
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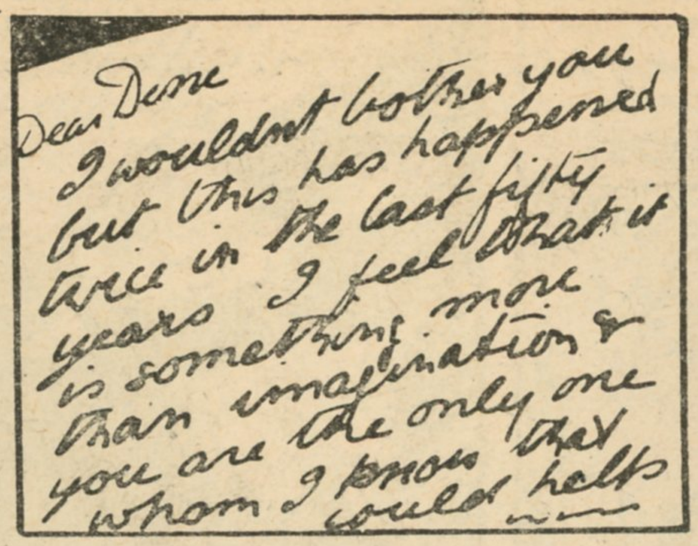
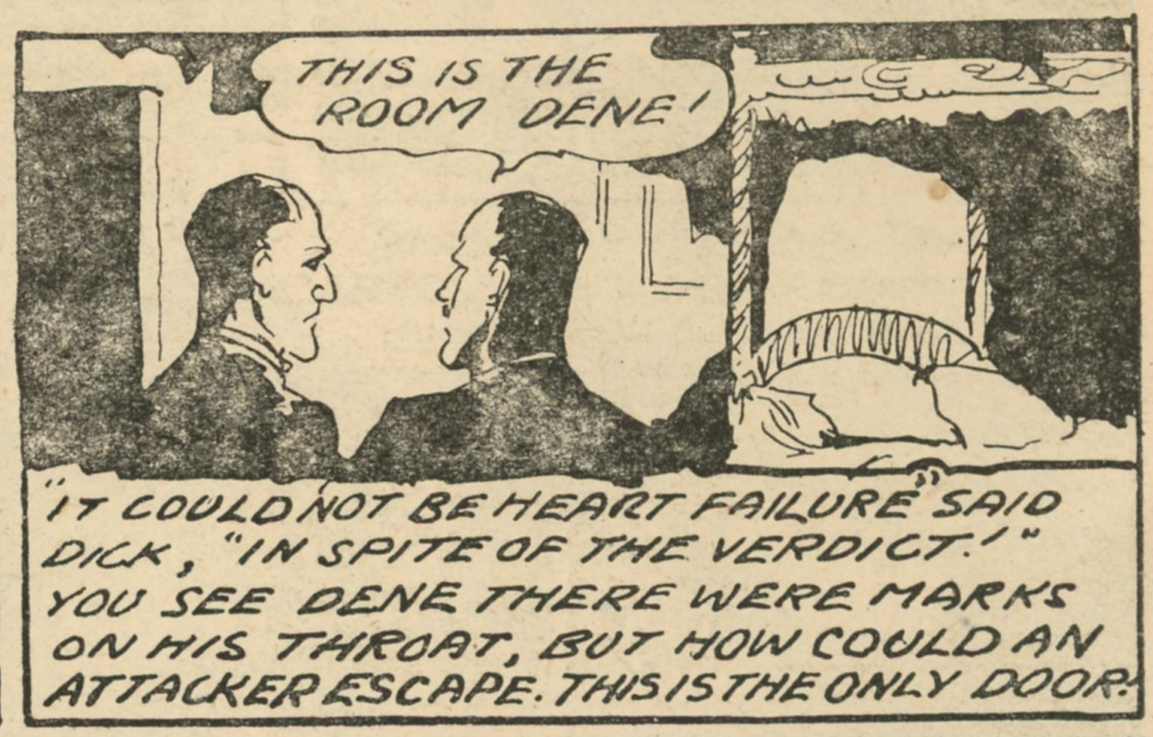
WRITE
TOMORROW

NEXT MORNING AN URGENT MESSAGE IS SENT TO DENE VERNON.


Dear Dene
I wouldn't bother you but this has happened twice in the last fifty years I feel that it is something more than imagination & you are the only one whom I know that could help

THIS SOUNDS INTERESTING! DICK ISN'T THE SORT TO SCARE EASILY!

THANK HEAVEN YOU'VE COME! MY GUESTS HAVE GONE AWAY AFRAID, AND I'VE SENT MY WIFE AWAY TOO, TILL WE'VE GOT DOWN TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS.

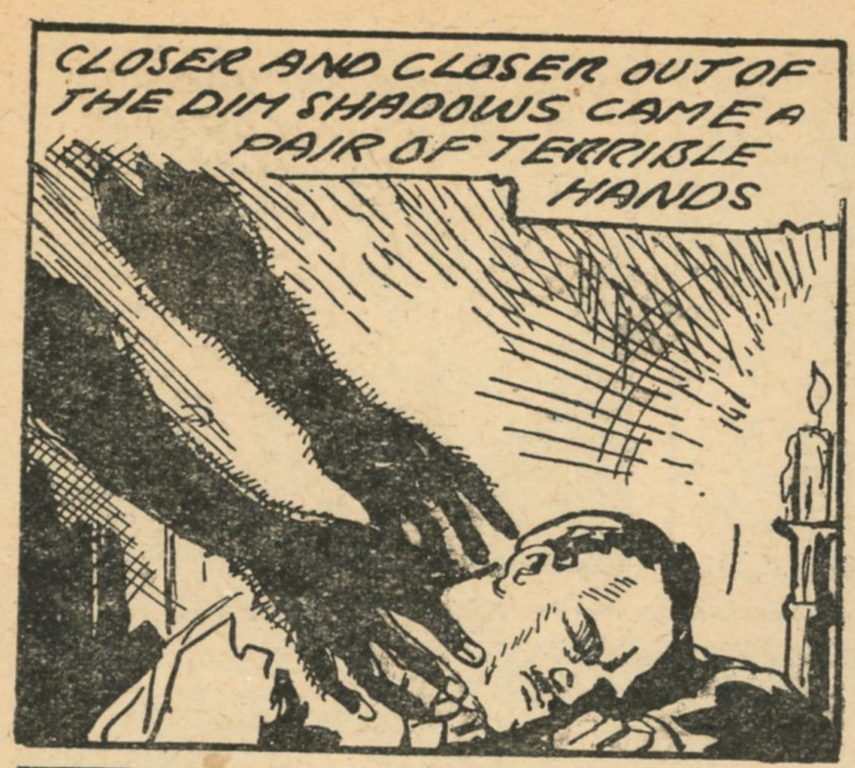

THIS IS THE ROOM DENE!
"IT COULD NOT BE HEART FAILURE" SAID DICK, "IN SPITE OF THE VERDICT!" YOU SEE DENE THERE WERE MARKS ON HIS THROAT, BUT HOW COULD AN ATTACKER ESCAPE. THIS IS THE ONLY DOOR!

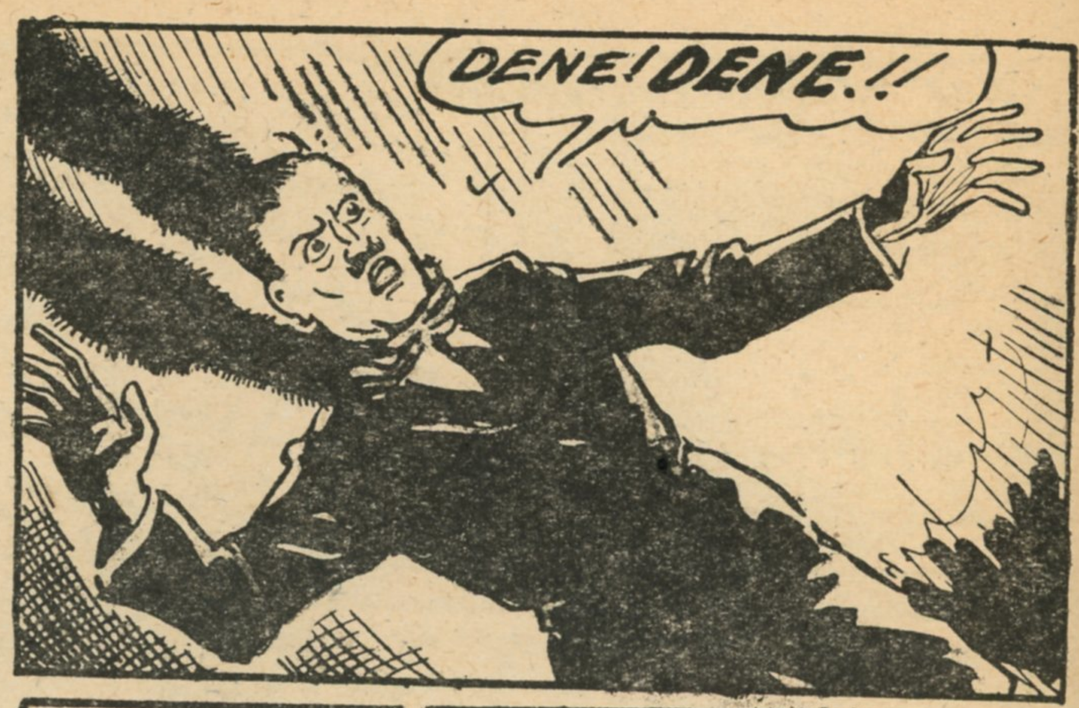
WE'LL MAKE OURSELVES COMFORTABLE IN THIS ROOM UNTIL WE FIND SOME CLUE!
WITH TORCH AND CANDLE, THEY DECIDED TO SPEND THE NIGHT IN THE HAUNTED ROOM

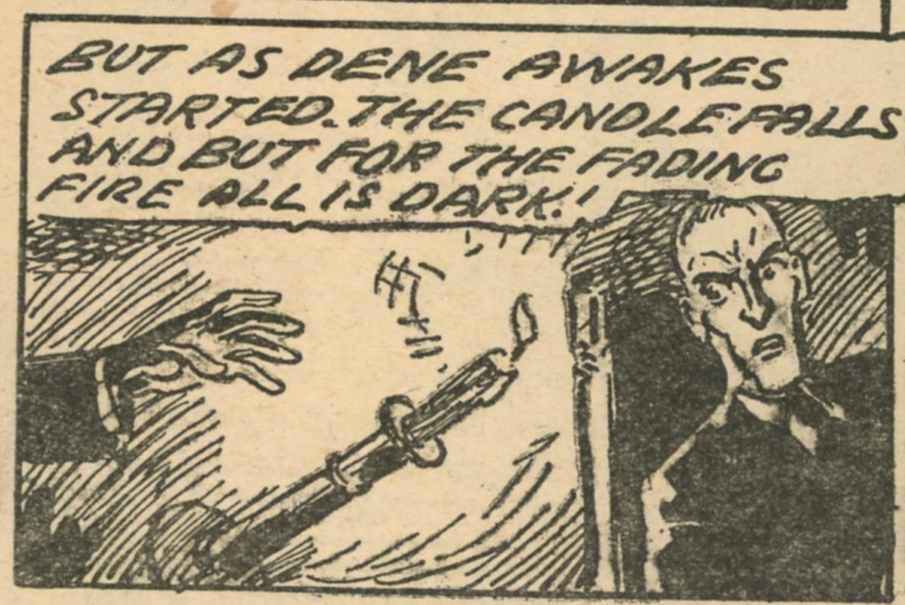
I'LL TAKE FIRST WATCH DENE! YOU HAVE A NAP, YOU'VE BEEN DRIVING ALL DAY!

GOSH! I FEEL TIRED OUT MYSELF.

DICK GRADUALLY NODS OFF, AND AS THEY SLUMBER, THE CANDLES DIM AND A WEIRD SHADOW STEALS ACROSS THE WALL AND HOVERS—


CLOSER AND CLOSER OUT OF THE DIM SHADOWS CAME A PAIR OF TERRIBLE HANDS


DENE! DENE.!!


BUT AS DENE AWAKES STARTED. THE CANDLE FALLS AND BUT FOR THE FADING FIRE ALL IS DARK!

WHAT IS IT DICK?

AH! AT LAST, MY TORCH!

GOOD GOD!

AN AWFUL CREATURE CHAINED BY THE NECK!

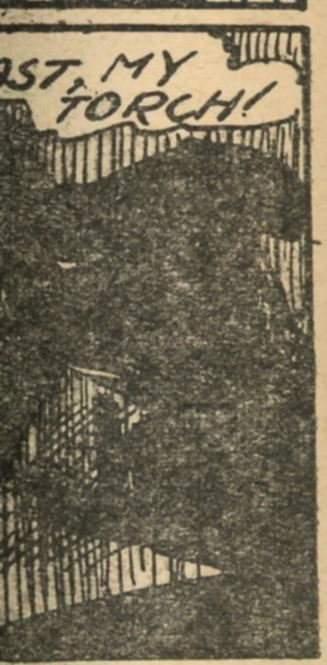
DENE HURLED THE CANDLESTICK AT THE GRINNING HORROR, IT SEEMED TO PASS RIGHT THROUGH IT!

SHRIEKS OF
LAUGHTER S
FOLLOW HIS

YES HURRY. IT'S URGENT!

DENE!— WHA
HEAVEN'S NA
WAS IT!

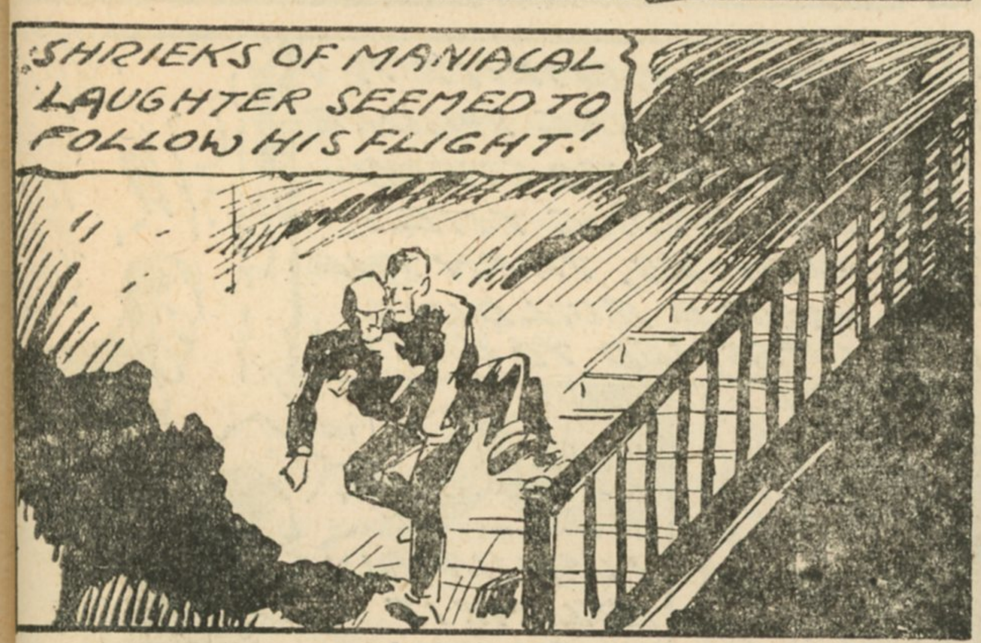
NE.!!


AST, MY
TORCH!

AWFUL
EATURE
AINED BY
HE NECK!

RLED THE
TICK AT THE
S HORROR,
ED TO PASS
HROUGH IT!

DICK DROPPED TO THE FLOOR AND DENE RUSHED FORWARD, SNATCHING UP HIS FRIEND HE DASHED FOR THE DOOR!


SHRIEKS OF MANIACAL LAUGHTER SEEMED TO FOLLOW HIS FLIGHT!

QUICK! PHONE FOR THE DOCTOR!
SAFE IN THE NEW PART OF THE HOUSE HE ROUSED THE BUTLER.

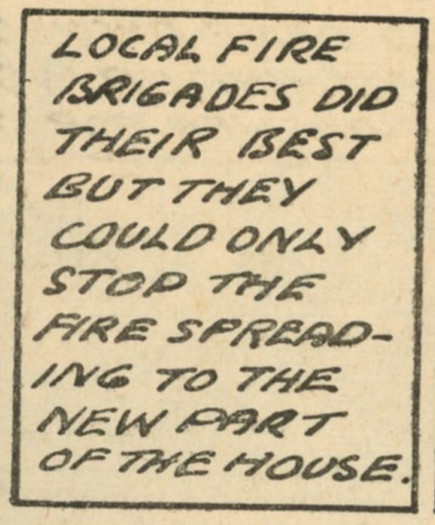
YES HURRY! IT'S URGENT!

WHAT'S THIS! PERKINS!
I'M AFRAID IT'S THE HAUNTED ROOM AGAIN!

DENE!— WHAT IN HEAVEN'S NAME WAS IT!
DICK WAS JUST RECOVERING FROM HIS AWFUL EXPERIENCE, WHEN THE BUTLER RUSHED IN —

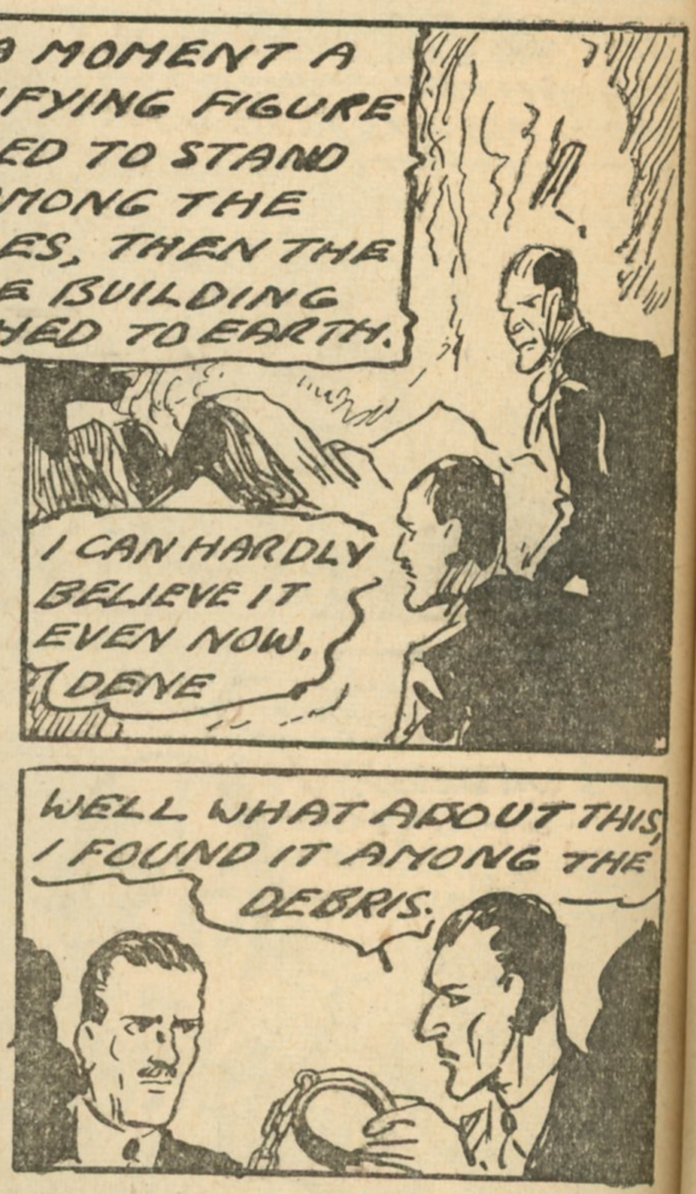
THE OLD WING'S ON FIRE SIR. AND IT SEEMS TO HAVE A GOOD HOLD!
DURING THE STRUGGLE IN THE HAUNTED ROOM A CHAIR MUST HAVE FALLEN INTO THE FIREPLACE, AND SCATTERED THE EMBERS!

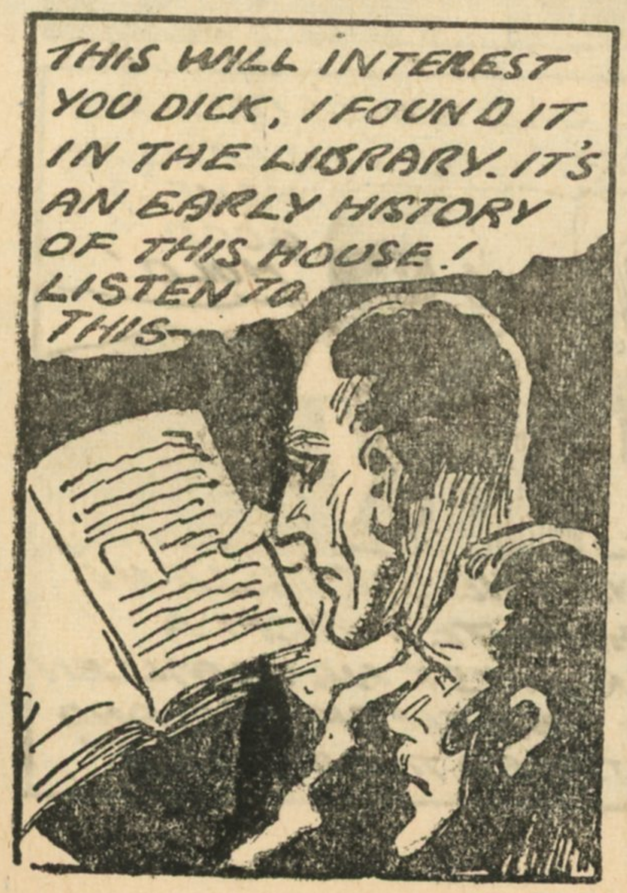
NOTHING CAN SAVE IT! IT'S MAINLY WOOD AND DRY AS TINDER!

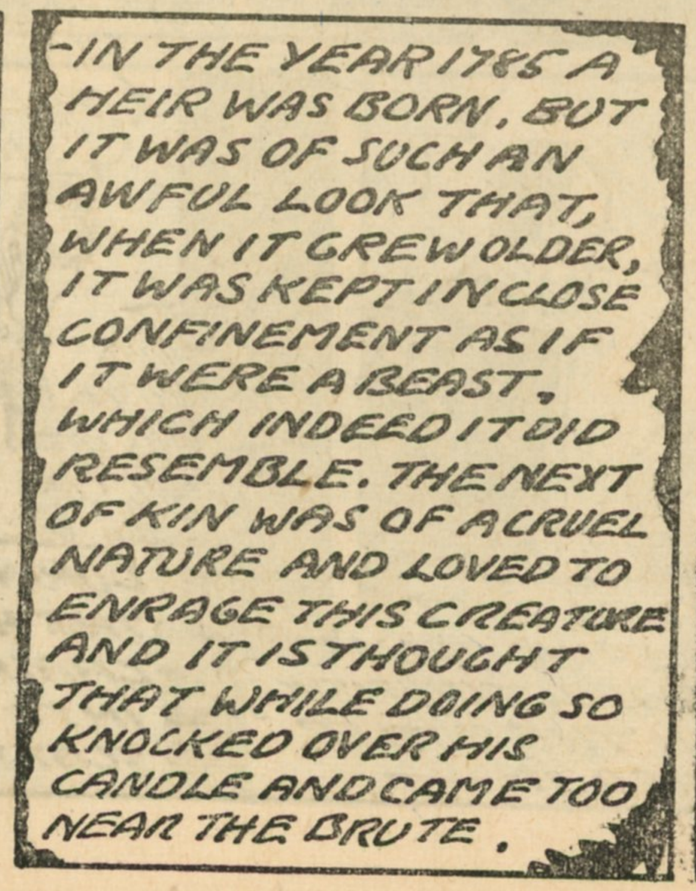

LOCAL FIRE BRIGADES DID THEIR BEST BUT THEY COULD ONLY STOP THE FIRE SPREADING TO THE NEW PART OF THE HOUSE.

STAND BACK!

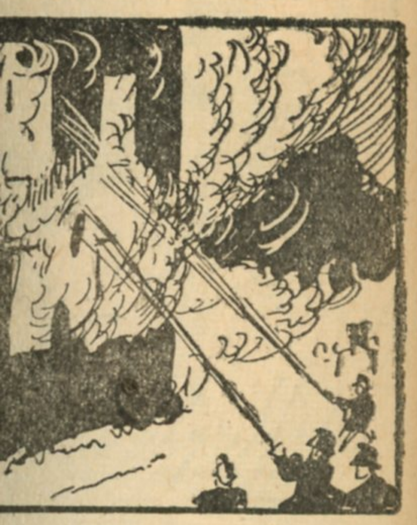
FOR A MOMENT A TERRIFYING FIGURE SEEMED TO STAND OUT AMONG THE FLAMES, THEN THE WHOLE BUILDING CRASHED TO EARTH.
LOOK! WHAT ON EARTH IS THAT?


I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT EVEN NOW, DENE
WELL WHAT ABOUT THIS, I FOUND IT AMONG THE DEBRIS.


THIS WILL INTEREST YOU DICK, I FOUND IT IN THE LIBRARY. IT'S AN EARLY HISTORY OF THIS HOUSE! LISTEN TO THIS—


—IN THE YEAR 1785 A HEIR WAS BORN, BUT IT WAS OF SUCH AN AWFUL LOOK THAT, WHEN IT GREW OLDER, IT WAS KEPT IN CLOSE CONFINEMENT AS IF IT WERE A BEAST, WHICH INDEED IT DID RESEMBLE. THE NEXT OF KIN WAS OF A CRUEL NATURE AND LOVED TO ENRAGE THIS CREATURE AND IT IS THOUGHT THAT WHILE DOING SO KNOCKED OVER HIS CANDLE AND CAME TOO NEAR THE BRUTE.

WELL, THAT'S ONE GHOST THAT HAS BEEN LAID FOR EVER!
THANKS DENE IT WAS ENOUGH TO LAST ME FOR A LIFE-TIME



The Dead Hand Grips

by JAMES BRUCE

IN spite of the tremendous glare of the day outside, down there in the sunshine and the burning heat of bowels of the earth it was both dark and cold.

But for all that, Travers was sweating—only it was the sweat of fear rather than of heat. For it seemed to him that he was wrapped around with the very cloak of Death itself. The darkness was that of the tomb; the stillness was that of the tomb; the very air he breathed, not without difficulty, was that of the tomb.

Down there it seemed that everything was dead—the air was dead; the silence was dead; the very dust that so thickly covered everything was the dust of Death. . . . He was rapidly commencing to feel that he was dead himself. . . .

He spoke sharply, and his voice seemed to startle the darkness:

"For God's sake let's get on with it, Granville! This place is too much like a tomb to be comfortable!"

From the blackness beside him there came a hoarse chuckle:

"Hardly surprising, seeing that it *is* a tomb, you fool!" The voice was so dry in quality, and with such a detached, superior note in it, that Travers thought, with a shudder, how it sounded like Death speaking.

"I mean *our* tomb!" he said, sulkily.

"Oh! Yes—quite. Well, so it may be, if we're unlucky!" The thin, dry voice paused for a moment, and then quoted:

"In the dark, where the dead lie stark—
Where the grave lies grim
In a place accurs'd . . . !"

"For God's sake shut up!" Travers voice rose to a high, hysterical note. "Or I'll go back and leave you to it!"

That dry chuckle came again:

"I'll bet a pound you won't, my friend! You'd never go along that passage alone—with all the bogies around you! But all the same, you're right, and we'd better get on with it. Only this accursed dryness gets at my bronchial tubes so . . .!"

A beam of white light from an electric torch cut through the blackness like a knife, and showed the yellow walls, with the crude carving on them, the low, tunnel-like roof, and the floor thick with grey dust. Then it was turned downwards to show a thin, long-fingered hand, in which lay a small bottle of tabloids:

"Here, Travers, you'd better take a couple of these, they'll steady you. Hold out your hand."

Travers obeyed, and Granville shook a couple of the tiny tabloids into the open palm—and noted how the hand was trembling.

"Swallow them down with a swig from your flask," directed Granville. "Then we'll get on—after all, we may be disturbed at anytime!"

He had snapped off his torch again—necessary to conserve their batteries. They were running short, and to

be without light in those regions of utter blackness was no joke at the best!

There came a faint, gurgling sound and then Travers said:

"O.K., Granville—and thanks!"

"Then forward—*allons* . . . !"

Granville snapped his torch on again, and led the way. The dust they walked on muffled their footsteps, so that no sound came from them, but it arose in a grey, choking cloud with every movement. Granville coughed and spluttered, then swore softly:

"Hell, one ought to bring a gas-mask on a job like this . . . !"

They came to the end of the passage, where it ran into another one, going left and right. But the beam of the torch was long enough to show them that the left hand turning was just a dead end, after about fifteen yards.

"To the right!" wheezed Granville, and they turned and went on.

The floor was sloping, which meant that they were going deeper and deeper under the ground. Travers didn't like that, although the tablets he had taken had already steadied him. But he was still very jumpy. He had a feeling, somehow, that evil, dangerous things were clustering around them—things that would not easily let them go!

Then Granville gave a sharp cry:

"By Gad, there it is! The fellow was right, then!"

His torch—the beam trembling slightly now from the tensity of his grip—picked out and held a break in the wall on their right—a heavy stone doorway, open about six inches, and with the dust piled around it like a snowdrift. Cuniform writing on the door.

Granville hurried forward, making the dust swirl as he went. He was staring eagerly at the door. But Travers was looking at the dust.

"What I'd like to know," the latter said, in a tense voice, "is how—since there's no draught or wind in this place—that dust got piled up like that. If the door's never opened . . . !"

"Oh, ask me another!" his companion answered, without interest. "We know it's been opened at least once in the last three thousand years or so, though!"

"Oh, damn!" Travers shuddered, for some reason. "Anyway, don't stand there gaping, let's get *on* . . !"

Granville pushed at the door. It remained immovable.

"Stiff, of course!" he commented. "Put your shoulder to it, Travers—you're the strong man of the party!"

Travers obeyed, but all his strength would hardly move it. With Granville pushing as well, they managed to get it open wide enough to let them in, one at a time. Granville went in first, with Travers nervously almost treading on his heels.

He put on his own torch as well as they got into the space beyond, but at a glance they could see it was only the ante-chamber. Another heavy stone door, covered with cuniform writing, faced them.

Granville hurried across to it. Travers still at his heels, and gave it a push. To the amazement of both of them it opened as easily and noiselessly as one that was used every day.

Travers shrank back, seized by a horrible feeling that there was Something behind that door, but Granville stood for a moment on the threshold and flashed his lamp around. Then he drew a deep breath and went inside the inner chamber. Travers, afraid to be left, followed him.

A great, square chamber hollowed out of the solid rock, and as Travers

entered it his nostirls were assailed by a sickly-sweet smell—the smell of embalming oils, perfumes and spices.

In the centre of the room stood the great sarcophagus, on a low plinth of black marble, so highly polished that the beams of their lamps were flung back at them like stars. In the various corners little groups of queer-looking things—earthenware pitchers, metal caskets, images, dolls, weapons. . . .

Granville waved his hands at them.

"The old Egyptians looked after their dead better than we do!" he commented. "There is food, tools, weapons, slaves—and wealth. All that a soul can need on it's journey to the new world. And they say the priests and magicians raised up powerful demons and spirits to guard the dead from destruction, too . . . !"

"Oh, shut up . . . !" snapped Travers, and Granville grinned. He rather enjoyed putting the wind up his more nervous companion.

"Well," he said. "Let's have a look at her . . . !" Then he pointed to something: "The tomb has already been desecrated, you will observe, my friend!"

He pointed to the heavy lid of the great stone coffin, which lay propped against the marble plinth on the further side of the sarcophagus, and then to a sort of metal coffer, which, with the hinges broken and the lid twisted off, lay on its side and displayed its yawning emptiness to them.

"That swine told me one lie!" Granville almost hissed, in his anger. "The treasure—the jewels and adornments of this lovely Egyptian Princess—*were* taken by him and his comrades. Or some of them, at anyrate. . . . It would seem that they were —disturbed . . . by . . . er . . . Something . . . !"

"What d'you mean — *Something* . . . ?" Travers almost yelped, in his nervousness. "For Heaven's sake *do* what's got to be done, and let's get out of this . . . !"

Granville took no notice of him. He stepped onto the marble plinth, and stood looking down at the recumbent figure with a deeply reflective, almost reverent expression on his hatchet face.

Then he said, very softly:

"The great Princess of Egypt, Nefexerxes . . . ! She lived—and died —more than a thousand years before Christ! And, after over three thousand years, she is still lovely to-day! And then fools tell us that beauty is but ephemeral stuff . . . !"

His voice trailed off, but his reflection continued, until a low sort of growl of impatience from his companion brought him back to earth. Then he bent lower over the coffin, and exclaimed:

"It would seem that our predecessors started to unwrap her—or some of the wrappings have given way with age. Or, more probably, a bit of both! Anyway, there's a hand here, bared. And, for some reason, it hasn't turned to dust, either, and dried as it is, it is still a superlatively lovely hand, let me tell you! Come up here and have a look at it, Travers!"

"No, thanks—I don't want to look at her—It . . . ! Get on with what you want to do, and let's get out of it as soon as possible, man!"

Granville chuckled again:

"Still nervous, eh? Well, I don't blame you, entirely! This doesn't strike me as being a place to hang about in. There's something about it . . . Tell you what, Travers—there's a scarab ring on the third finger of this left hand that's worth a packet,

I guess!"

But Travers gave a sudden violent start, and cried, quickly:

"Hell—what's that . . .?"

It was the distant sound of a shouting voice!

They listened—tense. It was coming nearer! Travers dropped his right hand to the bulge in his jacket pocket which indicated the presence of a revolver. . . .

Then the words became audible,—shouted as they were in the high-pitched tone of a native, and one who was much afraid:

"Excellency . . .! Excellency . . .! Where are you . . .?"

"It's Ahmed!" said Granville, sharply, but with a note of relief in his voice. "You answer him, Travers. My voice won't carry—this accursed bronchial-catarrh . . .! Go to the door, man . . .!"

Travers ran to the door and shouted:

"We're here, Ahmed! What is it? What's the matter . . .?"

Echoing weirdly through the passages of the tomb, the voice of their dragoman came back to them:

"Excellency! It is the patrol! They are coming here to inspect! One of my scouts has just come in with the news—we must get away at once, or they will capture us!"

Granville heard the words, and said quickly, with fear in his voce for the first time:

"My God, he's right! We're for it, if we're caught here—been too much of this tomb-desecration lately, and we'll be the scapegoats if they catch us. Tell him to go on and get all ready—we're coming right away!"

Travers passed on the message, and then turned to Granville, who had not as yet moved. He was bending over the coffin, doing something.

"Come on, then, man!" cried Travers.

"Just a second—I must have this ring, at least! But the damned thing won't come off . . .! Oh, curse it, the whole hand's come away, at the wrist . . .! Well, that'll have to do!"

With horrified eyes Travers saw him lift up a small brown hand, with the yellowed mummy wrappings still attaching it to the arm it had once belonged to. He caught his breath at the sight. Then, with a quick movement and a muffled oath, Granville broke the wrappings and thrust the hand into his side pocket.

"Come on, then!" he shouted, and the two of them ran from the Chamber of Death and out through the ante-chamber into the tunnel. The grey dust rose around them in a swirling, choking cloud as they ran, so that soon they were half-stifled by it. Granville was going first, and presently he commenced to slacken speed, gasping and choking for breath.

"Must—slack—up . .!" he gasped. "Can't—breathe . . .!"

But, behind him, Travers gave a sudden sharp cry:

"Come on—come *on* . . .!" he yelled. "There's Something behind—coming after us . . .! I'll swear there is . . .!"

He put on a spurt, and dashed past his companion, who, momentarily affected by his terror, miraculously pulled himself together and staggered after him. A few moments later, sweating, gasping for breath, and covered with dust, they reached the open air, where Ahmed waited with the horses. They scrambled into their saddles, and rode off at speed, just in time to avoid the sharp eyes of the patrol which, shortly after, appeared on the scene.

. . .

It was some time later, when they were camping by a small oasis for the night, that Granville showed the Hand to his companion:

"There you are!" he said, with some pride. "Look at it—the Hand of an Egyptian Princess! See it as it is now—still beautiful after all these centuries—and conceive how lovely it's owner must have been, more than three thousand years ago! And, incidentally, that ring is no cheap bauble either . . .!"

As Travers bent to look at it, there came to his nostrils once more a whiff of that uncanny smell that had met him in the Death Chamber—the combined scent of embalming oils, perfumes and spices. A sickly-sweet smell, with the mustiness of Death still clinging to it.

And that dreadful Hand fixed to the back of his neck.

Travers drew back, with a sudden shiver:

"Look here, Granville," he exclaimed, quickly. "Take a tip from me, man! Keep the ring, if you must—though I wouldn't even do that myself—but get rid of that hand. Bury it, or something! There's something sinister—dangerous—about it, I'll swear there is! And as you know, it wouldn't be the first time that bad luck—aye, and death—have followed in the pathway of things taken from desecrated tombs like this! Remember the case of the mummy of Princess . . .!"

But Granville interrupted him, scornfully:

"Rats, my lad! I'll keep it—just as it is! The trouble with you is that you are just neurotic . . .!"

But in his turn he was interrupted, and turned quickly to see the face of Ahmed, the Dragoman, staring at the Hand with fear and horror in his eyes:

"The Excellency is right!" he said slowly. "I do not think I am a coward but I would rather go to certain death than have that hand in my possession. The certain death might be easier . . .!"

"Nonsense!" scoffed Granville. "You're both as superstitious as kids and you croak like a pair of bullfrogs! I tell you I'm keeping it!"

He wrapped the Hand carefully in a silk handkerchief, and put it away in his haversack.

Ten years later, Granville, a wealthy man, gave up his wanderings and settled down in a large, old-fashioned house near Lingfield, in Surrey, where he lived the life of a country-squire, and occasionally threw house-parties for the entertainment of his many friends.

And five years after that, when one of these parties of his was in progress, he sat up late in his study, drinking whiskey and yarning with a number

of the men. They got him onto telling stories of his adventures abroad, and, after spinning a couple of quite exciting yarns, he gave a sudden exclamation and glanced at the almanac on the wall. Then he said:

"Excuse me, you chaps, for just a moment!"

He unlocked a small cupboard, which, when opened, revealed a number of volumes, neatly bound in leather, and each marked on the back with a number, stamped in gold. His intimates knew that these were his diaries, or log-books, as he called them, in which all his adventures and experiences were carefully set out in his own neat, copperplate handwriting. Now he selected a volume, the number on which indicated a year fifteen back from the one they were then in. After consulting it for a few moments he put it away, relocked the cupboard, and then turned to his expectant audience:

"Of course," he observed. "We all know about what are called traveller's tales',—and I daresay you all think I've just been giving you a couple of typical examples. Well, now I'll tell you one to which I can add a bit of proof . . . !"

He unlocked the door of a larger cupboard, which was full of curios and relics of his travels, and from it he took a small stone casket, of Egyptian workmanship, which he placed on the desk at which he sat. And then, the glasses having been replenished, he told his guests the story of the Princess's Hand—and at the end of it was able to show them the Hand itself. He lifted it carefully from it's box, and laid it on the edge of the desk, and they all crowded round and stared at it curiously, remarking on its beauty, the perfection of its nails, and so on. One man laughed, and said:

"Three thousand years old, eh? My God, times don't change much, really! Look how perfectly those nails are manicured! And they were stained, too—you can still see traces of it! Just like our modern women!"

"Only I don't suppose they'll look so well in three thousand years time." said Granville, sardonically.

One of the younger men made some sort of joke about the ancient Princess, and someone else gave a sharp exclamation. They asked him what was the matter, and he answered:

"I'll swear I saw that Hand move, then. The fingers twitched!"

"Hey! You've ben drinking too much Scotch, old man . . . !"

Another member of the party, who really was half-drunk, made a bawdy joke about what would happen if the rest of the Princess were there as well as her hand, and Granville, with unusual gravity, said:

"I don't somehow think I'd make jokes of that sort, if I were you, Haynes—not about this Hand, anyway!"

And, even as he spoke, a peculiar thing happened. All present afterwards agreed that they felt a rush of cold air enter the room, and with it the light failed for a second. In that second there came the unmistakable sound of a slap, followed by a crash and a curse. And then the lights came on again. And Haynes was half-lying, half-sitting in a chair, as though he'd been thrown there, with one hand to his cheek and cursing like a trooper.

"Who the hell did that?" he demanded, furiously. "Who the hell slapped my face—yes, and scratched it, begad . . . !"

And, sure enough, there was a deep scratch in the centre of a big red patch

on his cheek. Undoubtedly he *had* been slapped and scratched, but everyone there denied it. And only one man present—a man named Dixon, who was a naturalist and a very keen observer—got any clue at all to what had really happened. He chanced to be one of the men standing closest to the Hand, and he noticed that on one of those tapering, spidery brown fingers there was a tiny spot of blood, and, clinging to the long, pointed nail, a minute fragment of what looked to him uncommonly like human cuticle. But, being a wise man, Dixon said nothing—except to advise young Haynes very strongly to clean the scratch and put some iodine on it. Which young Haynes, being drunk and a fool in any case, failed to do.

Shortly after that the party broke up, and then Granville did a peculiar thing. For some reason he took the box containing the Hand up to his bedroom with him, a thing he had never done before.

Dixon happened to occupy the next room to Granville, and he had hardly gone off to sleep when he was aroused by strange sounds from next door. He heard Granville speaking in quick, staccato tones that sounded as though he was frightened, and *pleading*. Then came a sharp scream, almost instantly strangled into a cough. As though whoever had screamed had been suddenly gripped by the throat by a relentless hand . . !

Dixon sprang out of bed and ran to the door of his host's room. From inside came queer sounds—sounds of thumping and bumping, as though a fierce struggle was going on in there. Intermingled with it was a horrid coughing and gasping sound, as though someone was choking . . . !

Dixon tried the door—it was locked. He shouted, and thumped on the panels with his fist.

There was no answer. He listened again, and now the sounds of struggle were diminishing, but that choking noise continued. And from under the door there came a blast of air, and with it a smell that Dixon recognised—a smell of embalming oils and spices, musty with time. He had noticed the same smell emanating from the Hand, when it had lain on the study desk. . . .

From the bed there came a violent creaking, as though some heavy body had fallen—or been forced—down upon it. Then the choking sound changed to a harsh, agonized rattle, horrible to hear. Then silence.

After that, only one more sound, which occurred a moment or so later. It sounded as though the lid of a stone box had dropped back into place!

Dixon roused the house, but, being a wise man and not desiring to be thought mad, he merely said that he had heard strange noises from Granville's room, and thought he must be ill—also that he could get no answer to his knocking.

They broke in the door, and found Granville, in his pyjamas, sprawled across the bed. His face was black, and horribly swollen. Eyes and tongue protruded, and there was on the face an expression of the most terrible agony (or fear?). On the swollen throat were the marks of fingers that had gripped . . . !

But Dixon, when he entered the room, looked around for something else besides the corpse, and saw the decorated stone box which contained the Hand, lying on the dressing-table. He opened it, and looked at the Hand lying inside. He even touched it, with one finger—and found that it

"Oh, curse it, the whole hand's come away, at the wrist."

was curiously warm and *alive* feeling. But still he said nothing!

For years Granville had been under doctors and specialists for chronic asthma, and the local doctor had no hesitation in granting a certificate. His opinion was that he had choked in the midst of a particularly virulent spasm of that complaint. He did notice the marks on the throat, but pointed out that it was quite common for people who were choking to grip their own throats spasmodically.

But Dixon thought differently! He was also interested to hear, a fortnight later, that young Haynes had died of bloodpoisoning as a result of that scratch!

Granville's brother, Robert, inherited the money and estate, as Granville had died intestate, and he came to live at Linfield, accompanied by his daughter, Dorothy, who was twenty years of age and something of a beauty.

Granville had met his death on the night of September 5-6th, and on the anniversary of his death, a year later, another party was in full swing in the house that had been his. It was a house-party given to celebrate the engagement of Dorothy to Dickie Stanton, a handsome and wealthy young Guards officer, who had been her childhood playmate.

And the grand climax of the house-party was a magnificent ball, following upon an almost magnificent dinner at which the engagement was formally announced. The late Granville had been a caustic, sardonic and aggressive sort of person, little loved by his relatives, and that was perhaps, why nobody noticed that this climax of the gay doings in his house was actually given on the anniversary of his tragic death.

Nobody is not quite correct though. Dixon, who was an old friend of the family, was one of the guests on this occasion also, and he remembered it. It was to this recollection that he attributed the queer feeling of nervous tension that possessed him that evening—the sort of feeling that one has sometimes before a thunderstorm, that the whole world is waiting, hushed, for some tremendous and devastating event.

The ball was a really gay and colourful affair. Most of the guests were in fancy-dress, encouraged thereto by the fact that Robert Granville was giving prizes of £100 each for the prettiest and the most original costumes. Dorothy and Dickie, the centre of interest, were attired respectively as a Princess of Ancient Egypt and a Scribe of Ancient Egypt. Neither of them were competing for the prizes—each felt that, in the other, they had drawn the best prize in the world, so no others interested them!

It must have been about eleven o'clock when one of Dickie's friends said to him:

"What time's the parade for the prizes, Dickie? Midnight, isn't it? Well, there's no doubt about who's going to collar the one for the most original costume! Have you seen the little Mummy of the Eyptian Princess?"

"No," Dickie laughed. "Is there one about— I ought to be *au fait* with her, in any case—she's right in my line of business to-night!" And he ndicated his Scribe's costume.

"Well, there she is, curiously enough. Isn't she a wonder?"

Following the direction his friend indicated, Dickie saw a most remarkable figure. The graceful lines and contours of it, apart from the face, made it clear that it was a woman,

and a very beautiful one, and it looked as though it was covered from head to foot in swathings of soft, shimmering silk. Not swathed, of course, as a mummy is, in one bundle, but each limb separately, thus allowing freedom of movement. The effect as she walked, with a singularly graceful, gliding movement, was remarkable, for the colour of the shimmering swathings, which was a sort of pearl-grey, gave her the appearance of being almost transparent.

But the most striking thing of all about her was her face—if it was *her* face. Actually no one could tell whether it was her own countenance, heavily and remarkably painted, or whether it was just a mask, so absolutely still and expressionless was it. But whichever it was, it was transcendantly beautiful, with a beauty that hardly belonged to earth at all. It was, as someone remarked, like the beautifully painted face of a lovely dead woman.

Now, as this strange figure crossed the floor, with it's smooth, gliding motion, it passed close to Dixon, who had his back turned. He started violently, and spun round to stare at it —for, as it passed, his notrils had been assailed with a strong whiff of that perfume he was destined never to forget—of embalming oils, spices, and the mustiness of death . . . ! And now he stared after it like one who looks upon a ghost . . . !

"By Jove!" cried Dickie. "But what a lovely creature! I must ask her for a dance . . . !"

Another number was just beginning, and he saw his *fiancé*, Dorothy, go whirling away, superlatively beautiful in the arms of another man. Then he turned and hurried across to the silken stranger:

"Since it would seem we are at least compatriots," he said to her, with a little bow. "Would the beautiful Princess deign to dance with the lowly scribe?"

She turned to look at him—not just her eyes, but the whole face. He was sure, then, that it was just a painted mask, for the beautiful eyes looked into his with an absolute blankness and lack of expression that almost shocked him. Yet, when she answered, the painted lips moved. She said:

"Why, wes—if the Scribe does not fear to dance with the dead!"

"To dance with such beauty, dead or alive, is an honour!" he answered —and bravely stifled the involuntary shudder that went through him at her words.

Next moment they were dancing. He found it a strange sensation, for she was as light as a piece of thstledown, literally. Indeed, so light, so impalpable, was she that once or twice he had a queer feeling that he was actually dancing *by himself*, and had to look down at her to make sure she was really there! Another thing that rather worried him was the perfume she used—a queer, sickly-sweet perfume that suggested, somehow, spices and oils. . . .

After the number was finished she said, in a strange voice that was almost as detached and mechanically artificial as was her face:

"And now I must talk to you for a moment. Take me somewhere where we can talk!"

There was something curiously commanding—imperious—about her words and manner. It was as though she had been used to giving orders —and having them obeyed! He led her obediently to the great palm-court, which was at the moment al-

most deserted. All the time he had a feeling that everything was strange and unreal. That feeling increased when she spoke to him, without preamble:

"Richard Stanton," she said, in that strange, toneless, distant voice, that seemed, somehow, to be coming from an immense distance away. "Richard Stanton, I am going to be merciful to you for two reasons—first because you are a lover, and I, too, was once a lover, and secondly because you are a warrior, and the man I loved was also a warrior! Now, listen carefully, and be sure to do exactly as I say. Sixteen years ago to-day, the uncle of the girl you love was in Egypt. While there he committed a great—an unforgivable crime! He broke into the tomb of the long-dead Princess Neferexes and desecrated it in the vilest fashion. For when he was disturbed, in striving to take a ring from the finger of the left hand, the whole hand came away at the wrist—and he carried it off with him and kept it. He kept it in spite of warnings—and he had many—and on this night of last year he was killed because of it . . .!"

"But hang it all!" Dickie ventured to interrupt. "The doctors said he died of . . .!"

"Never mnd what the fools of doctors said—he was strangled in his bedroom by the Hand that he had stolen, actuated by the curse that the outraged Gods of Egypt set upon him—and upon his house! And that is what concerns *you*, Richard Stanton. For to-night his brother—who has also ignored warnings—will die in the same way! *And on this night of next year, unless you do as I bid you, the girl you love, who will inherit the Curse, will die in the same way*! Now, this is what you have to do—and I advise that it be done quickly. Secure the Hand, which reposes in a casket in a drawer in Robert Granville's room. Take it back to Egypt, and see that it is replaced in the outraged tomb. In order to find the tomb, secure the services of a man named Travers—you will find him at the Traveller's Club, in London. He will guide you to the tomb. He will not wish to do so, but you can persuade him—with money! Do this, as I have told you, and the curse will be lifted—neglect it, and the girl you love will die a horrible death! I have spoken!"

She made a commanding gesture with her left arm as she said this, and, with a shock that made him go cold all over, Dickie realised that *there was no hand on that arm*—it ended abruptly in a stump . . .!

For a moment he went faint, and closed his eyes. When he opened them, she had gone . . .!

Dickie's thoughts were in confusion. He didn't know whether to believe the extraordinary story he had been told, or whether to think someone was having a joke with him. Eventually he decided that the best thing to do was to talk to his prospective father-in-law about it—to find out from him whether such a Hand existed, and whether he had had any "warnings" about it.

But when he went to look for Robert Granville, he could not find him. And when, a little later, Robert's presence was required for the parade for the prizes, timed for midnight, he was still missing. . . .

Robert Granville had had a sudden desire to be alone. It was more than a desire—it was a craving. And, with the place over-run with guests, about the only place where he could find

sanctuary was his own bedroom—which once had been his brother's.

The night was close—the air singularly still, with that uncanny stillness and tensity that usually precedes a thunderstorm. Once in the bedroom, Robert stood by the open window and tried to get some air, but found it difficult. He found that he was perspiring, and that his collar seemed too tight. The perspiration, too, did not seem a natural one. It was cold and clammy—the sort of perspiration, he thought, that a man might have just when he was dying! He put the thought aside with a shudder — Robert Granville was afraid of death!

Then he became conscious of a strange smell in the room—a sickly-sweet, spicy sort of smell, with a queer *musty* tinge to it. And, while he was still wondering what it could be, he heard a sound behind him—as though one of his drawers was being cautiously opened!

"Who's there?" he cried, sharply, and at the same time sprang to the switch and put on the light.

There was no answer to his question—no one in the room. But as he looked towards the chest of drawers his whole body stiffened, his face went deathly pale, and his eyes glared in fearful doubt at what they saw. For one of the drawers was slowly opening—apparently of its own volition. And then, as he stared with distended, unbelieving eyes at this phenomenon, he became aware of something else. Protruding over the inner edge of the drawer were five small finger-tips . . . it was as though someone *inside* the drawer was pushing it open from within! But that was plainly impossible . . . !

Heavens! thought Robert, to the tune of his racing heart, I'm seeing things! I'm going mad, or something! Here, I must get out of this . . . ! With all his mental strength he strove to force himself to turn and run from the room—and failed. As in a nightmare, his feet seemed to be fixed to the floor—his limbs to be bound with invisible bonds.

And now the drawer was open to the extent of about six inches, and from that opening the Hand came forth, and rose into the air, where it hung suspended—the slim, spidery index finger pointing directly at him as though in accusation, while he stared at in a paralysis of terror, his eyes wide with horror and the saliva running unheeded from his tremulous lips.

Then it commenced to move slowly and with infinite menace, through the air towards him, the long, slender fingers writhing convulsively, like the tentacles of some great insect—and with that the power of life and movement came back to him.

With a low gurgle of terror he turned towards the door to fly—but the Hand was there first! It slammed the door, turned the key in the lock, and then came at him again . . . !

One wild scream of terror left his already blueing lips, and then, as he felt the clutch of the Hand upon his throat, his knees gave under him and he slumped, limp and inert, to the floor. . . .

And once again the verdict (there was an inquest this time) was "Natural Causes"—not entirely incorrect in this case, because Robert had actually died from heart-failure, caused by terror.

Dickie Stanton hardly knew what to think or what to do about it. From the moment she had left him the Mummy had completely disappeared.

No one saw the going of her, as no one had seen her come—and no one seemed to know who she was or anything about her. Luckily, however, Dickie had a talk with Dixon, who for the first and last time told what he knew—about the death of Granville and of young Haynes, and about the Hand, and Granville's story of how he acquired it. And all this fitted in so well with what the mysterious Mummy had told him that, when he found the Hand itself, lying in its stone casket in one of the drawers in the bedroom, he did not hesitate any longer.

As Dorothy was left entirely alone except for distant and almost unknown relatives, by the death of her father, they were quietly married a month after the funeral, and the first thing Dickie did at the end of a short honeymoon was to seek out Travers at the Traveller's Club.

He found him without difficulty—in fact he was actually in the Club the first time Dickie called there. Dickie was not to know it, but Travers had aged considerably in the sixteen years that had elapsed since he had helped to desecrate the tomb of the Egyptian Princess, and was now a neurotic, semi-invalid. This may have accounted for the fact that he nearly fainted when Dickie mentioned the Hand to him. When he had recovered a little, he gasped:

"Good God, am I *never* to be allowed to forget that accursed Hand?"

"How d'you mean, forget it?" Dickie asked. "I thought you had been out of touch with Granville for years before his death?"

"Oh, yes, I had, but . . ." Travers made vague gestures with a shaking hand. ". . . I have had dreams—*awful* dreams . . . visions, maybe—I'm not sure! But what do you want to know about the Hand, my boy?"

When Dickie told him the object of his visit Travers at first resolutely refused to have anything at all to do with it, but Dickie was tactful, and when he pointed out that, once the Hand was restored, these dreams or visions that had haunted Travers for so long would almost certainly cease, and added to that the further inducement of a fee of five hundred pounds (for Travers had fallen on evil days financially) he gave in, and agreed to go to Egypt with him and guide him to the Tomb.

So eventually they started off for Egypt, a party of three—for Dorothy was to accompany them as far as Cairo, where she was going to stay with friends while Travers and her husband went on to the Tomb—exactly seven months after the death of Robert Granville.

Even so, they had plenty of time in hand when they started, yet in the end it became a race against time, for in Cairo Travers was taken ill with some mysterious complaint which the doctors there could not diagnose, and it was nearly five months before he was able to travel on the next and last stage of the journey.

So it was actually once more on that fatal anniversary, the 5th of September, that Travers and Dickie Stanton, accompanied only by a trusted dragoman, approached the entrance to the tomb wherein lay the mutilated mummy of the Princess Nefexerxes. Travers looked the ghost of his former self, and the state of his nerves was demonstrated continually by the way he fidgeted, trembled, and constantly looked over his shoulder, as though he suspected some danger behind him. Dickie, on the other hand, was in the best of health,

though deadly anxious that the Hand should be restored within the limit of time mentioned by the mysterious mummy at the ball—and this was the last day and drawing to the close of it.

Slung over his shoulder as he rode —and it had never left him since they departed from Cairo—was a specially made steel box, fastened by a Chubb lock, in which reposed the Hand itself. The key of the box he wore hung round his neck, by a chain.

About a mile away from the tomb, and out of sight of the entrance to it, they left Abdulla, the dragoman,

One wild scream of terror left his already blueing lips.

with instructions to await them. Then the two white men rode on by themselves.

As they drew near to the entrance Travers' nervousness increased to such an extent that Dickie, noting how tremulous he was and the deathly paleness of his face, became alarmed about him, and asked if he was feeling ill.

"Yes," Travers answered, in a low voice. "Deadly ill—I—I don't know what's wrong, but I feel dreadful! I tell you what it is, old man—I shan't be able to come into the tomb with you. I just couldn't do it! But I'll give you careful directions, so that you can find the Chamber by yourself—it's not at all difficult, actually! Do you mind very much?"

"Not in the circumstances," Dickie answered, kindly, for he felt sorry for this pitiable wreck of a man. "So long as I can get the Hand back before sunset, I'll be quite happy!"

"Oh, you'll do that easily!" There was a tremulous relief in Travers' tone. "Now, listen carefully . . .!"

He then proceeded to give him the necessary directions for getting from the entrance to the Death-Chamber itself, to all of which Dickie listened with careful attention. By the time it was finished, they were within a few yards of the narrow, black oblong in the side of the massive stone tumulus which was the entrance itself.

Travers reined in:

"Now, you go ahead!" he suggested. "I'll wait here with the horses. Only for Heaven's sake don't be too long! I—I shan't be able to stick it for any length of time! I—I . . .!"

His voice trailed off in a peculiar way, and Dickie saw that his face had gone a sort of ashen-grey, and that his eyes were wide and staring, his mouth loose and tremulous. He looked as though he was going to have a fit!

Dickie tried to urge his horse nearer, and then became aware that the animal had gone curiously stiff, and was trembling all over. It resolutely refused to move!

From behind him there came a sharp *click*, as though a lock had been turned. He looked round quickly, but could see nothing. But an instant later he became aware of a strange

and weird sensation—as though something, like a huge spider, or other insect, was climbing up his back . . . !

Involuntarily he shuddered, and it took all his strength of mind to stop himself from crying out, as he felt the thing crawl swiftly up his back, and finally perch on his shoulder. He saw that Travers had turned his head and was staring at him with his face convulsed by an expression of the most dreadful terror. Then he glanced down at his own shoulder—and almost screamed aloud at what he saw there!

For resting on it, as though it's owner was standing just behind him, was a hand. A small, slim, brown hand, with long, spidery fingers, and a great scarab ring on one of them! It did not need the whiff of embalming oils, and spices and must, to tell him what that Hand was, and who it belonged to.

And then, even as he stared down sideways at it, his eyes fixed with horror, he distinctly felt the Hand give a slight, gentle pressure to his shoulder—as though it were reassuring him! And in that moment his terror went.

But it came back as he saw the long, slim fingers curl downwards and felt, rather than saw, how the uncanny thing seemed to *crouch,* as though for a spring . . . ! Then there came a wild shriek from Travers, and he distinctly felt the jerk on his shoulder as it *did* spring. . . .

And the next thing he was aware of was that the Hand had fastened itself to the throat of Travers, and seemed to be shaking him furiously from side to side, while his face blacked and horrible suppressed cries and gurgles came from his terror-twisted lips. Then he fell (or was dragged?) from his horse, and for a moment lay struggling wildly in the sand. Then he rose—or was pulled—to his feet—and the next moment he seemed to be running madly towards the entrance of the Tomb—running with his head thrust forward, his arms madly threshing the empty air, and that dreadful Hand fixed now to the back of his neck. But *was* he running—or was he being pushed by that ghastly Hand, or by some Force that was actuating it . . . ?

In a moment he had disappeared through the entrance, and from the darkness beyond came terrible, ear-piercing shrieks, as from one in an extreme of agony or terror—or both. The shrieks gradually dwindling and dying away, muffled, into the bowels of the earth. Almost as though the very earth itself was smothering the victim of its vengeance . . . !

All that time Dickie had sat his horse, motionless. He had tried with all his strength to go to the rescue of Travers, but he had been as helpless as though bound with chains. He had tried to shout for help—and towards the end, in his ultimate horror, tried to scream. But as in a nightmare, though he opened his mouth no sound came from it . . . !

But now, suddenly, he felt himself potent once more. The use of limbs and voice came back to him, and he shouted, loudly:

"Hold on, Travers—I'm coming."

There was a worn iron ring by the entrance, and he stayed only to hitch his reins to that. Then, revolver in one hand and electric torch in the other, he raced into the blackness, following carefully the instructions that Travers had given him, and, heedless of the grey death-dust that rose to blind blind his eyes and choke his lungs with every step he took. . . .

The Death-Chamber at last! Yes, there was the great sarcophagus, on it's plinth of black marble. And there was Travers—or what was left of him!

But at the sight that met his eyes there, Dickie recoiled, shuddering.

Half-lying and half-kneeling against the plinth, the body of Travers was sprawled, face downwards—or it would have been face downwards, but for the fact that the poor devil's head had been twisted completely round, so that his face stared upwards from between his two shoulder-blades with such an expression of frozen horror on it as Dickie had never seen before, or was likely to again! What colossal, inhuman strength had been used to perform that awful operation he could not imagine—nor would he allow himself to try!

He did not bend to examine the corpse—no need to, it was so dreadfully obvious that he was dead—but, impelled by some force quite beyond his control, he stepped softly and reverently onto the plinth and looked down into the stone coffin.

The mummy of the beautiful Princess Nefexerxes lay there, peaceful and serene. Her left hand, though bare of the mummy-wrappings, was joined to the arm, and the scarab ring flashed and sparkled in the light of his torch. And when he looked for a moment on the painted face of the death-mask he saw at a glance that it was the same face that had looked so strangely into his on the night of the ball. And as he looked down at it now, it seemed to him that, for a fleeting instant, there crept a shadow of a smile into the painted eyes and lips, and in that instant he knew that the vengeance of the princess was complete, and that he and his beloved Dorothy were safe.

Then it semed to him that hands, strong but gentle, seized him, propelled him from the Chamber and hurried him at breathless speed along the dark passages and tunnels—from which he presently emerged into the sunlight and the air, where it seemed that hands other than his own unhitched his horse and lifted him into the saddle. . . .

But a moment later he was almost out of it again, for his mount shied violently as there sounded from behind them a tremendous crashing and a rumbling that shook the ground. And then he saw that the whole side of the tumulus had caved in, and that the dark oblong of the entrance had disappeared. The Princess was guarding herself affectually against any possible future desecration . . .!

He was still staring at the dust-clouded ruin when Abdulla, the dragoman, came galloping up. He had heard the rumble, and hastened to discover the fate of his employers.

He asked one question:

"The other Excellency . . .?"

White as death itself, Dickie pointed silently to the ruin, and Abdulla bowed his head:

"It is the will of Allah!" he said, and then added, meaningly: "Who is One with all the Gods of old . . .!"

Then, since there was nothing to be done, they turned and rode silently away—back to Cairo, to love, and to sanity.

THE END

THE LAST WORD

by W. E. TILLOTT

SILAS WHEELER rejoiced in that day more than he had rejoiced in any day for more years than he cared to think of. And he rejoiced in it for curious reasons.

Most people would have seen it as a grim, gloomy, drab miserable day and would, if they could, have fled from it to the pubs or the pictures—or at worst drawn their blinds, switched on their lights, and shut it out.

But Silas rejoiced in the melancholy howling of the wind, the flurries of cold wet rain, the two shades of dull, monotonous grey that covered the sky, the lower and slightly darker strata hurried along below the upper and lighter one by the wind.

The dull *plash-plash* of the raindrops in the puddles was like sweet music to his ears, and the sodden, soft, muddy fields and roads, littered by the last lonely autumn leaves that drifted down, shrunk, shrivelled and dead, from the bare branches of the rain-glistening trees, made a view he would not have exchanged for all the sunshine and green fields in the world.

From time to time he exclaimed, as he looked at the weather :

"What a day for a funeral! My God, *what* a day for a funeral . . . !"

As a matter of fact nearly everybody else in the village was saying the same thing—but not by any means in the same way. They said it with glum faces, and with discontent and grumbling in their tone. But Silas said it with his pale-blue eyes sparkling and his thin lips drawn back from the yellow, broken teeth in unholy joy!

"What a *day* for a funeral . . . !"

And he walked about the dull, cold gloomy old house, that was now undisputedly his, humming a song gaily. It wasn't written then, but if it had been, and he'd been familiar with it, I have no doubt he would have been singing : *"It's a hap-hap-happy day . . . !"*

And it certainly was a happy day for Silas, for was it not the day on which all that was left of his late wife, Elspeth Wheeler, was to be consigned to the ground, to be covered for ever by a six-foot depth of cold, wet earth, and there to be consumed, at their horrid leisure, by the worms? A lovely thought that, as it ran through his head. Silas rubbed his hands in delight and chuckled aloud.

The funeral procession, when at two p.m., it moved away from the big gloomy house which had been the home of the two Wheelers for so long, fully justified the event it was to the village. It was, they said to each other, certainly as fine and imposing a funeral as money could buy.

There were four horses to the hearse, all jet black and with black velvet cloths on their backs and big, black, nodding plumes on their heads. And the coffin was an expen-

sive affair, too, with big brass handles and a brass plate. There were no flowers on it, it is true, but word had gone round the village as soon as Elspeth had died : " No flowers, by request." But whether the request came from Elspeth or Silas, no one could say. As a matter of fact it came from Silas—who was willing that the funeral should be imposing, but quite unwilling that there should be anything pretty about it. And the villagers were relieved, because they had all hated Elspeth so much that they would not have liked to have to be so hypocritical as to send flowers to cover her bare coffin !

That was the secret of the whole thing—everyone had hated Elspeth, and the one who had hated her most was her husband, Silas. That was why he had been so lavish in the matter of the funeral—because Elspeth had always been a miser, and he knew how she would have hated that any more than the minimum sum necessary should be spent on her funeral. So he had even gone to the length of ordering six mourning coaches. He rode in the first, alone, and in each of the others rode a single hired mute, in his shabby silk hat and black coat. It added a touch of mockery to the ceremony, which pleased Silas immensely !

Every soul in the village who could get there was at the funeral, but they were all waiting at the church—not one followed the coffin from the house, although it was a bare two hundred yards away. That would have been a sign of love or respect, neither of which they were prepared to show to the corpse of Elspeth Wheeler ! No, they were just there to see the last of her, and most of them to draw a breath of relief when the wet sods thumped down onto the big, heavy coffin. Everybody in the village was there to see the last of her, but amongst them all there was not one mourner—and that included her husband himself, who was delighted again at the thought.

He had chosen the site for the grave part of the churchyard, and he stood by its yawning mouth and rejoiced in the whistle of the wind and the flurry of rain that came down from the blackest cloud of the day as the coffin was lowered into its last resting place. At the bottom it splashed into water, and Silas had some difficulty in resisting a grin of satisfaction at that, and the sound of the wet, muddy shovelsfull of earth flopping dismally onto it as it lay down there was like glad in the loneliest and most desolate music to his ears !

A student of of mob-psychology should have been interested in that scene, for the atmosphere of hate was so strong that one felt it was a wonder that a flash of lightning didn't come from heaven and consume the coffin completely. Or from Hell, which would have been far more fitting.

For that was the sort of atmosphere Elspeth Wheeler had created when alive—she hated everyone and everyone hated her. Most of all her husband, who had the greatest reason to hate her.

As the parson, his white surplice soaked with the driving rain, turned away from the grave, Silas turned suddenly to the silent, sullen onlookers, who were also about to depart. He held up his hand, and they paused staring at him :

" You've all come along here," he said, in a loud monotone, "to pay your last respects to the dear departed. Now I want you to come along to the house, where a funeral collation has been spread for you in the big

barn. There will be plenty to eat—and to drink—so don't fail to come along. Besides, *she* would be pleased to know what you were doing!"

Some of the less imaginative chuckled at that last, regarding it as a joke. But the more sensitive shuddered a little at the mockery and hate behind it. But they went, just the same—free food and beer wasn't to be sneered at!

Afterwards they all said it was one of the finest feasts they had ever had. Silas had done the thing in style—put it all in the hands of a catering firm from the nearby town—and there were great joints of beef and legs of pork, and barrels and barrels of beer, and even cases of whiskey. Why, it must have cost a small fortune—and, somehow, the thought of how Elspeth, the old miser-woman, would have hated the idea tickled them—especially after they had consumed a few pints of the free beer!

When it was over, and they had all departed, Silas went into the house and changed his black clothes. He put on a suit of gay, bright check, with breeches and gaiters, and he took his stout ash-stick and slipped the leather throng of it round his wrist, as he always did. Then he set out for the "Kings Head," and spent the evening there treating everyone who cared to have it to more drink, and laughing and joking with them all. By ten o'clock most of the village was very drunk, but, although he had had as much as any of them, Silas was quite sober still.

He went back to his house—it *was* his house, now—and sat by a big fire and drank hot whiskey, while his thoughts roamed back over the past.

He had been a gay young spark in his youthful days. He had money—or, rather, his father had—and he spent it freely. Wine, woman and song. And gambling.

Then he had courted young Elspeth Greymole. She had been slim and beautiful then, with a sort of *beauté du diable* that had made the dames of the village look askance, and whisper behind their hands old wives hints of the "evil eye" and witchcraft. She was certainly witch enough to make young Silas lose his head over her! It was not an easy wooing—she teased him and tormented him, and made him crawl on his knees to her for months, but at last consented to marry him.

The first month of his married life had been a happy one for him, with a sort of hectic happiness born of physical passion. He had loved and hated her at the same time. But, after that. . . .

His hate had predominated. He beat her and bent her to his will, and got a queer, sadistic joy out of it. At the same time he liked to dress her up in silks and satins and jewels, and his father having died, he spent a good part of his inheritance in this extravagant way.

But it was not his only extravagant way—he also spent money like water in drink and gambling. And, after a while, on other women. And Elspeth took it all remarkably meekly though wise folk prognosticated that she was only biding her time. And the wise folk were right!

When, at last, Silas was face to face with ruin and bankruptcy, his wife, with her far cleverer and more ingenious brain, came to his rescue. She showed him a way out of his difficulties. It was a dishonest way—a *very* dishonest way—and would have earned him five years penal servitude if he had been found out. But it was, as she pointed out, fool-proof, and

Silas had some difficulty in resisting a grin of satisfaction.

there was no way in which he could be found out.

So he did it—and regretted it for the rest of his life!

For it was not quite fool-proof after all. Only one person could give him away—but that person was Elspeth! And within a week of the doing of it she let him know just where he stood. She held clear and indisputable proofs of his guilt, and she had only to send them anonymously to the police, and he would be arrested and sentenced to a long term in goal. And unless he came to heel, and acknowledged her as his master, she would do it.

At first he had fought against it, but he was scared stiff of imprisonment, and in the end he knuckled under. And then the meek and patient Elspeth showed herself in her true colours! Tyrant, virago and miser, she made his life a hell on earth from that day onward. She controlled the purse-strings and everything else. She fed him—or, rather, starved him—on the poorest and scantiest of food, doled him out miserably inadequate sums of spending-money, and controlled his every movement. She nagged and bullied him until he went nearly mad. By her meanness and sharp practice, some of which he appeared to be responsible for, she made him almost as much hated in the village as she was—and he had always loved his popularity.

In her hands money did not dissipate as it had in his. On the contrary, it increased and multiplied. She lent money at interest to villagers who were poor, and on mortgages to those who were richer but temporarily embarrassed. She sold up defaulting clients and foreclosed on her mortgages with complete ruthlessness. She bought property, too, until she owned nearly two thirds of the village and had a reputation as a hard landlord (or rather, earned one for Silas) that extended all over the country, and further. Always she pretended to be merely the agent: "You see it's nothing to do with me, really—it is my husband's money, and I must carry out his instructions!" That didn't entirely throw dust in the victim's eyes—they held Silas responsible, but thought she influenced him, which didn't make him any more popular, though!

But, in all the thirty-five years that this was taking place the one thing that had enraged and humiliated Silas more than anything and everything else was the fact that always, in their many quarrels, Elspeth had the last word. And that last word was usually a threat to give him away to the police which cowed him, outwardly, as a sight of a whip does an ill-treated dog. Sometimes, retiring after a combat of this sort he used to mutter, albeit hopelessly, to himself. "Never mind—maybe one day it'll be me that has the last word!"

And now, by God, he had it!

Yes, he told himself, as he poured more whiskey down his dry throat, he'd got the last word, now! He'd been having it all day—with the lavish funeral that would have made her scream with rage, and that feast for the crowd afterwards that would have broken her black heart, if she'd had one! He laughed aloud, harshly, at the humour of it. He'd got the last word this time, alright. And it was the final last word, too!

—Or was it? An idea, born of the vast amount of spirit he had consumed, came to him then. With a laugh, he rose, got his stick and hat, and went out into the night. The rain had ceased, but the cold, lonely wind was

still blowing, and a faint moon, showing spasmodically between the wind-driven clouds, made the silent world look weird and ghostlike. But Silas grinned, as he took the road to the graveyard :

" *Her* ghost is safe enough, anyway, under six foot o' cold earth—and I'm afraid of no other !"

He entered the graveyard and presently stood by the newly-raised mound of earth that marked her grave. He was delighted to see how wet and sodden and cold the desolate, flowerless grave looked in the pale moonlight, and he stood there, with his arms folded and the ash-stick dangling, suspended from his wrist by its leather thong, and stared down at it, wishing he could see her corpse lying down there amid the mud and the water—and the worms !

After a while he spoke :

" So, you hell-cat," he said, in a low tone, vibrant with concentrated hate, " There you are, gone to your master, the Devil, while I'm still here—to live and enjoy life again as I used to before you spoiled it for me, you brimstone-bitch ! And, mark ye, it's me that has that last final word, and I've come here to speak it to you ! You can't answer back now, you witch's spawn—because you're cold and dead in your grave, and I'm alive and happy ! Ha-ha ! And this is my last word—that I wish you hadn't died so quick. If you'd have lived a bit longer—if I'd had you there helpless at my mercy—I'd have . . . I'd have . . ." he paused for a moment as though to think what he would have done, and then went on, " . . . I'd have done *this* to you, as I do it now, and hope you can feel it . . . !"

He grasped his ash-stick, leaned forward a little to avoid a great puddle at the edge of the grave, and then slowly thrust the stick into the soft earth of the grave, thrusting it slowly downwards and twisting it as he did so, as though he was twisting it in an open wound. His eyes glowed with hatred, and his thin lips were drawn back in an animal snarl, as he thrust his stick deeper and deeper. . . .

And just then the church clock struck twelve. . . .

Suddenly the stick jerked in his hand, and he gave a sharp cry of mingled astonishment and terror. *For something had gripped the stick* —Something down there in the earth —in the grave—and was slowly pulling it downwards, downwards. . . .

Silas let out a sort of yelp of terror. Then he commenced to struggle against that remorseless downward pull. But it was useless, for the strength of that pull was more than human. His feet slipped in the treacherous mud, and he sprawled on his knees.

Mouth open, jaws slavering, eyes distended with terror, he tried to release himself from the leather thong that fastened his wrist to the stick. But it had drawn tight, and the leather was too tough to break. He tried to get handhold to resist that pull, but there was no handhold—only sodden earth that seemed to have become soft and yielding as that of a bog. . . . .

Madly he slipped and struggled and flapped, like a fish caught on a line—and as uselessly ! Down—down went the stick, drawn by that irresistable force, until now it had vanished —and his arm was following it. . . .

Then he started screaming, like a rabbit in a trap, and kept on screaming until presently his face was drawn down into the mud, and his cries were stifled with his breath ; until at last even the spasmodic kick-

ing and struggling ceased, too, and his limp, inert body was drawn slowly and remorselessly downward.

Down, down. . . . Down into the cold, wet earth, until only the sole of one stout boot could be seen. And then that disappeared, too, and the earth closed over it like the soft, wet lips of some obscene animal, and then there was nothing more to be seen at all . . . !

It certainly looked as though Elspeth had got the last word, after all . . . !

THE END

WITCH'S LULLABY

Ratsbane, Hellebore, Nightshade, Aconite,
Bat's wings, toad's eyes, hairs from a leper—
Put them in the cauldron, keep the fire both hot and bright—
Hell's broth a-boiling for Somebody's supper!

Black cat with fiery eyes; owl hooting in the tree;
Black bat a-flying; rats that squeak and wriggle!
Dead men turn in their graves and whisper secret words to me—
Worms writhe and twist and turn, what a higgle-piggle . . . !

Spirits that moan and groan; Death Watch goes tack-a-tick—
Wax image of my enemy, with pins to make a stab at!
Throw all my clothes off and leap upon my broomstick—
Fly through wind and thunder-storm—away to the Sabbat!

W.J.E.

IN AN OLD GRAVEYARD

Curved scarlet of Queen Cleopatra's lips;
Fair Helen's snow-white breasts—where are they now?
Salomé's swaying and seductive hips —
As she, dead head on charger, makes her bow?

Alike the lovely wantons and sweet saints have passed
Through the Grim Gate, whence there is no return—
Who are their lovers now? Whose arms at last
Embrace them—whose kisses make their soft lips burn?

Upon an aged tomb the answer lies,
All fat and fed, rejoicing in it's slime
And basking before my horror stricken eyes—
The Worm, to whom we all must come in time!

W.E.

THIS MIGHT HAPPEN TO YOU! . . . IF IT DID . . .

As Slim released the catch of the front door it seemed as though it was being pushed against him from outside. He let go the handle and stepped back, and as he did so the door swung open and the form of a man, that had been kneeling and leaning against it, fell across the mat with a dull thud. He wore a striped apron and still clutched a pint bottle of milk in his hand. But he was quite dead!

The police! He'd better find one quickly, or they might think he had something to do with this! He stepped over the body and down the short garden-path into the street. Surprisingly, he found a policeman at once—only a few yards away. But he was lying spreadeagled on his back—and he was dead, too! A little further down the road a newsboy lay across his bicycle—also dead. A girl with an attache-case lay beside a man with an umbrella—they had been on their way to business. A tradesman's car had smashed through the railings of a house, and the driver lay limp across his wheel. Everyone in sight was dead!

Suddenly, as he stared, dumbfounded, at this astounding scene, there came to the mind of Slim recollection of that article about the mad Nazi professor who had threatened to destroy the whole of humanity with his death-ray—a ray that was to blot out humanity only, sparing all other living creatures . . . ! A living dog that just then chased a living cat across the bottom of the street gave sudden colour to Slim's thought. Was that what had happened? Was he, then the only human being alive in the world at that moment . . . ? *Was* he . . . ?

Panicking, he turned and ran back into the house—it seemed more secure there, somehow. . . .

IF YOU STEPPED OUT OF YOUR FRONT DOOR ONE MORNING AND FOUND THAT EVERYONE IN SIGHT WAS MYSTERIOUSLY DEAD, WHAT WOULD BE THE FIRST THREE THINGS YOU WOULD DO . . . ?

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SO THIS IS DEATH

by J. LEOPOLD WOLLETT

I DIED quite easily. I hadn't thought it would be so easy to die as all that, or I would have taken what I expect the newspapers described as "the fatal plunge" a lot sooner.

And what they tell you about all your past life passing before you while you're drowning is all poppycock. At first it was pretty awful, and then all I was thinking about was if I could get another mouthful of air to help me out before my lungs burst with the water that was being sucked into them and how my eardrums were cracking with the roaring in them, and so on. In other words, I was funking it at the last.

Then all that passed, and I stopped struggling and got quite peaceful. It seemed as though I was a long way from myself, and was just going to sleep in a nice, soft bed. It wasn't warm, of course, but I was so cold and numb that it felt almost the same as being warm.

And the queer part of it is that I actually *did* sleep, and I dreamed. I dreamed about death—but not mine. Other people's. I dreamed about the death of Peggy, and the death of Tim, the dog. Went through it all over again, but this time, funnily enough, I felt no pain or grief, like I had done before. And when they were both gone, I felt very lonely—but only like you do when you've seen someone you're fond of off by train somewhere and you know you'll meet again soon.

I didn't feel that awful, hopeless loneliness; that terrible, rending uneasable pain; or that sense that there was nothing now left at all to live for, which was why I had deliberately swum out beyond my distance and then let myself sink. . . .

I woke up slowly. It was a bad sort of waking. I was quite dry, but very cold, with a curious sort of coldness like I had never felt before. It was a sort of *empty* coldness. That's the nearest I can describe it. Rather like the sort of coldness you feel on quite a warm day, when you haven't had anything to eat for a long time. And yet not quite like that, either.

I wondered where I was. I couldn't see anything—not because it was dark but because there was a thick, grey mist everywhere. A queer sort of mist that seemed to shut one in very closely.

Then I remembered. I felt myself—my clothes. It was rather like feeling something when your hand is numb. But I could make out that I had all my clothes on, and that they were not wet, which struck me as curious. I was lying on ground, like baked earth, very hard and quite dry.

I got slowly onto my feet. My limbs were very stiff at first, but got easier with every movement. I still couldn't see a thing for the mist—not even my own hand when I held it up before my face. It felt queer. Not exactly frightened, but very *strange*—so strange that it felt almost like being frightened, except that, somehow, I knew

quite certainly that there was nothing to be *frightened* of—or about.

It came to me that I had better walk. I tried, and found I could do so, though my limbs felt heavy. Almost as though there were lead weights tied to them.

So I set off to walk through the mist. I could still not see a thing, but I walked at my best pace, without caution lest I should fall into a hole, or trip over something. I had no fear of that, and, anyway, my top speed was little better than a crawl.

I continued to walk—I don't know for how long. I still felt terribly cold, but that was not so bad as the loneliness. I felt lonelier than I ever had before—more lonely than I should have thought anyone could ever have felt. I seemed to be the only living thing in the Universe—a Universe without colour, or shape, or sound. It was dreadful—but still I was not frightened, or even anxious.

Presently, as I walked, the mist seemed to get lighter, and thinner. It was white now, instead of grey, and I could make out the ground at my feet. It was flat and smooth and hard, like beaten earth or rock, with no colour or variation in it.

I kept on. The mist got thinner and lighter, very vaguely I sensed that there were other people, or things, in the vicinity, somewhere. I got a nebulous sort of impression of figures that moved, and of shapes that did not. Buildings, maybe.

As I went along the visibility increased, and soon I found that I was in a curious situation. I was walking along a narrow path, or causeway, and on each side of me there was a stretch of water, black, oily, and very still. There was no ruffle on the surface, and I could see no land beyond, on either side.

But as I went I became conscious of changes. The mist lightened still more, and changed to a faint yellowish colour. There was a suggestion of sunlight somewhere behind it. I noted, also, that the path I was walking along grew slowly wider, and the waters on either side proportionately narrowed. I could faintly see land now on either side, and as I went along the banks—they were smooth and straight, as though cut by hand—grew nearer and nearer, but very gradually. There were no trees, no shrubs, no flowers and no buildings, it was all very flat and utterly desolate. Except for those vague impressions of movement in the background, almost beyond my ken.

In much the same vague way I became conscious of sound. a broken murmuring, as of voices, but very nebulous, and quite unintelligible.

I went on. I became gradually warmer, and still the path I trod widened, and the waters on either side of me narrowed.

And then, on a sudden, I stopped dead. For, very faint and distant, but still unmistakable, there came to my ears a sound that was as familiar as my own voice—and more welcome to me than all the songs of all the angels. The distant barking of a dog! Or, rather, not of *a* dog, but of one dog in particular. A high-pitched, yelping note that brought the sort of thrill to my heart I never expected to know again. The shrill, ecstatic bark of my old dog, Tim, used to give vent to when he saw me in the distance. And it was coming nearer . . . !

Nearer and nearer . . . ! Louder and louder . . . ! And presently there was the old chap himself, on the left-hand bank, leaping about and almost screaming with delight at the sight of me. I called his name as loudly as I

could, but it seemed as though my voice was muffled by cotton-wool, or something like that. All the same, he seemed to hear it, for he paused for a moment as though to listen. Then he started barking and leaping again. He tried to get into the water, but at the last moment seemed to be frightened of it. Queer, that, because he had always been a good water-dog.

As I stood there, staring at him. Filling my eyes with the sight of his old, familiar shape. I couldn't see him quite clearly—it was almost as though I was looking through clouded glass. I put that down to the mist, or to some dimness of my eyes.

It came to me that I must walk on. The path was widening, and the water narrowing—in time I might be able to jump it, or Tim could. . . .

So I walked on, and Tim, barking and yelping on an increasingly loud note, followed along the further bank.

After awhile I heard a new sound. It was as though comeone called my name in a very faint voice—and it was my name spoken in an old, familiar way, as I had never expected to hear it spoken again. And, turning my head, I saw on the right hand bank another figure—a human one, this time—that had lived for months only in my memory. In my stifled voice I called out, Peggy, Peggy! and faintly her dear voice came back to me; I am here, she said. I am here, dearest . . !

As in the case of Tim—still yelping and barking, more frantically than ever, on the other bank—I could not see her quite clearly, but clearly enough to recognise her dear features, and the dress she had on. It was the last one she had worn—on earth. . . .

So I am dead? I asked her. And she answered, that is what you would call it, and she smiled. How wonderful it was to see her smile again. I said, I took my own life, and she stopped smiling then, and nodded, gravely. Yes, she answered, that makes it more difficult, you see? And she pointed at the black water. That's nothing, I said, I can swim. But she cried out, No, No, you mustn't do that! She seemed frightened. You must just keep on walking, she cried, the water is narrowing, and soon, if all is well, we shall all be together. What do you mean, if all is well? I asked her. But she did not answer, only waved to me to walk on. Tim, on the other bank, was trying to tell me the same thing, too. I sensed that they were both frightened, and I became frightened, too, for the first time since I had been dead. But I didn't know what I was frightened of!

I hurried as fast as I could, but my limbs still felt heavy. Mingled with my fright was great joy that I was so close to my dear ones again—that I should soon be with them . . . *if all was well*. . . .

Suddenly I felt queer—ill. I stopped in my tracks. It seemed I could not go further. I was conscious of the other two, Peggy looking anxious, with her arms half outstretched, and Tim with his tail down and his head a little on one side. . . . Then it seemed that something — something invisible — took hold of me and dragged me slowly but irresistibly into the still, black water.

I caught one more glimpse of Peggy, heard a low cry of pain from her, and an agonized yelp from Tim. And then came blackness, and a terrible and increasing agony, that seemed to be first in my head, and afterwards in my body—a terrible, racking, torturing, rending agony, as though something was tearing my vitals out, and rending the very soul from my body. . . .

It seemed to go on for years—for aeons. The blackness was a roaring thunder, tearing at my ear-drums. Then the blackness turned blood-red, and the roar became a shrill shrieking . . . And then. . . .

I was staring up at the old, familiar blue comfortless sky, and there was cold, empty sunlight in my eyes. I was lying in my back, and some fellow with a fat, shiny face, like a full-moon, was working at my arms. He had large, round glasses on, and the sweat was running down his silly face. Someone behind him, out of sight, spoke :

" I reckon you'll get the Royal Humane Society's medal for this," he said.

The fat man answered, pantingly :

" Oh, I don't think so. Hardly worth it . . . !"

The other spoke again, his voice a silly squeak :

" By God, you've done it ! He's coming round, and I'd have sworn he was dead as a doornail ! Wonderful gag, this artificial respiration stunt !"

" By jove, you're right !" said the fat man. He stopped working my arm, and bent his silly sheep's face close to mine : " Hullo," he murmured, sloppily. " Feeling better, now, eh ?"

Suddenly realization came to my numbed brain. Realization of all that had happened, and of what this fat-faced fool had done for me. I wanted to scream aloud, but I couldn't. All the same, I managed to croak :

" Feeling *better* . . . ? Why you . . . ! "

And then I cursed him to hell and out again—cursed and damned his eyes and his soul as I have never cursed a fellow-man before.

He looked startled at first, then that silly, unctuous smile spread all over his fat face, and he shook his head, and said over his shoulder to the other man :

" Poor devil, he's delirious ! That's what it is."

" Never mind," said the other. " He'll be better soon, and then he'll thank you enough. I'll bet !"

Shall I . . . ?

THE END

THE WERE WOLF

The Moon's a-gleam and the Snow is white,
All the land lies quiet in the grip of Night.
'Tis time to rest, but I cannot rest
For the heart that thunders within my breast ;
For my pointing ears and my sharpening teeth—
Red tongue that lolls 'mid my steaming breath. . . .
Now my limbs are covered with soft, grey fur—
Hark . . . ! What was that . . . ? Did Something stir . . . ?
Yes ! Dark Shapes slink o'er the pallid snow—
My brother Wolves call me, and I must go !
For the Moon's a-gleam and the Snow is white—
Ho ! my Brothers—we hunt to-night . . . !

E. L. LOWITT.

WEIRD STORY IN BRIEF

It seemed to him as he strode across the vast moorland that he must be the last human being left in the world. Around him the wind moaned and howled like a lost soul in it's inescapable loneliness. The rain, stinging and cold, smote his face as though it were flung at him by the vicious hands of fiends unloosed, and the only living sound was that of an owl hooting, with sinister melancholy, from a distant tree.

And presently, as the darkness fell and closed about him like a wall, the muddy earth sucked at and gripped his feet, as though to drag him down to some unknown Depths.

Suddenly the black sky was ripped and torn by a gigantic flash of lightning, coming as it seemed from nowhere, and the muttering of the thunder was like the menacing growl of some obscene monster. . . .

He muttered to himself :

" It is as though the Devil himself was abroad to-night !"

And then two steel-like claws, that burned as they touched, gripped his throat, and a deep, hoarse voice whispered :

" You are right ! *He is* . . . !

L. T. J. Wilte.

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